

STUDIES IN GLOBAL SOCIAL HISTORY

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISM AND TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

RADICAL NETWORKS, MASS MOVEMENTS
AND GLOBAL POLITICS, 1919–1939

EDITED BY
HOLGER WEISS



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Studies in Global Social History

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Global Politics, 1919–1939*

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Abbreviations

ADGB	Allgemeiner deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund
AIZ	Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung
ARA	American Relief Agency
ARSO	Arbeitsgemeinschaft sozialpolitischer Organisationen (Working Group of Social Policy Organisations)
CDO	Cultural Diplomacy Organisation
CDRN	Le Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre
CGT	Confédération Générale du Travail
CGTU	Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire
Comintern	Third or Communist International
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
ECCI	Executive Committee of the Comintern
EV	Einheitsverband der Seeleute, Hafenarbeiter und Binnenschiffer
FILM	Federazione Italiana dei Lavoratori del Mare
FUMP	Fédération Unitaire des Marins et Pêcheurs
IAH	Internationale Arbeiterhilfe (International Workers' Relief)
IFTU	International Trade Union Federation
ILP	Independent Labour Party
IMD	L'Internationale des marins et des dockers
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IPC	International Propaganda Committees
IPAC	International Propaganda and Action Committee
IRA	International Red Aid
ISH	International of Seamen and Harbour Workers
ITF	International Transport Workers' Federation
ITS	International Trade Secretariat
ITUCNW	International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers
IWA	International Worker's Association
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
KID	Clubs for International Friendship
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Communist Party of Germany)
KUTV	Communist University for Eastern Workers
LACO	League Against Colonial Oppression
LAI	League Against Imperialism and For National Independence

LDRN	Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre
LSI	Labour and Socialist International
Mezhrabpom	Workers' International Relief
MFGB	Miners' Federation of Great Britain
MOPR	Soviet section of the International Red Aid
MTWIU	Marine Transport Workers' Industrial Union
MWIU	Marine Workers' International Union
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NAM	Non-Aligned-Movement
NCBWA	National Congress of British West Africa
NDV	Neuer Deutscher Verlag
NEP	New Economic Policy
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NKID	People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs
NKVD	Soviet Secret Police
NMM	National Minority Movement
NUS	National Union of Seamen
NWA	Negro Welfare Association
OMS	International Communications Office of the Comintern
Orgburo	Organisation Bureau
PCF	Partie Communiste Français
Polcom	Political Commission of the ECCI
Profintern	Russian acronym for RILU
RGO	Revolutionäre Gewerkschaftsopposition
RILU	Red International of Labour Unions
RHD	Rote Hilfe Deutschlands
RKP (b)	Russian Communist Party (bolsheviks)
RUP	Rassemblement Universel pour la Paix (Universal Rally for Peace)
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland
SMM	Seamen Minority Movement
SOI	Secours Ouvrier International
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany
Sportintern	Red Sports International
TsK	Central Committee
TsK MOPR	Central Committee of the MOPR
TsK RKP (b)	Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party
TSMO	Transnational Social Movement Organisation
TUC	Trade Union Congress
TUUL	Trade Union Unity League
TWMM	Transport Workers Minority Movement

UNIA	United Negro Improvement Association
VKP (b)	All-Union Communist Party (bolsheviks)
VOKS	Soviet All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries
WEB	Western European Bureau of the Comintern
WIR	Workers' International Relief, the British section of the IAH
WUL	Workers' Unity League
YCI	Young Communist International

List of Contributors

Gleb J. Albert

is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. His dissertation on early Soviet internationalism, defended at Bielefeld University in 2014, will be published as “Das Charisma der Weltrevolution. Revolutionärer Internationalismus in der frühen Sowjetgesellschaft, 1917–1927” by Böhlau in 2017. Among his recent publications are: “Activist Subjectivities and the Charisma of World Revolution: Soviet Communists Encounter Revolutionary Germany, 1918–19”, in Klaus Weinbauer e.a. (eds.), *Germany 1916–23. A Revolution in Context* (Transcript-Verlag, 2015); “‘To help the Republicans not just by donations and rallies, but with the rifle’. Militant Solidarity with the Spanish Republic in the Soviet Union, 1936–1937”, *European Review of History* 21:4 (2014).

Bernhard H. Bayerlein

is senior researcher at the Institute of Social Movements at the University of Bochum, Germany, and associate at the Center of Contemporary History in Potsdam Guest. He is the Coeditor of *Jahrbuch für historische Kommunismusforschung*, and Editor of *The International Newsletter of Communist Studies*. He has published widely on Communist history and the history of the Comintern, including “*Stalin, der Verräter bist Du!*” *Vom Ende der linken Solidarität. Sowjetunion, Komintern und kommunistische Parteien im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1941* (Aufbau Verlag, 2008) and *Deutschland-Russland-Komintern. Neue Perspektiven für die KPD-Geschichte und die deutsch-russischen Beziehungen*, 3 vols. (De Gruyter, 2014/2015).

Kasper Braskén

is postdoctoral researcher at Åbo Akademi University in Turku, Finland. He is a historian specializing in German, transnational, global and social movement history. He is the co-editor of *H-Socialisms* and the author of several articles on international solidarity, communism and anti-Fascism. Braskén's first research monograph is titled *The International Workers' Relief, Communism, and Transnational Solidarity: Willi Münzenberg in Weimar Germany* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). His ongoing postdoctoral project (2014–2017) will result in a research monograph on transnational anti-Fascism in interwar Europe, 1923–1940.

Fredrik Petersson

is Lecturer in General History at Åbo Akademi University since 2014. He received his PhD from Åbo Akademi University in 2013, on the dissertation “We

Are Neither Visionaries Nor Utopian Dreamers". Willi Münzenberg, the League against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925–1933 (published as Vol. 1–11, Queenston Press, 2013). Petersson currently works on two projects: the forthcoming monograph on transnational anti-colonialism *"The Elephant and the Porcelain Shop". Transnational Anti-Colonialism and the League Against Imperialism, 1927–1937* (for publication 2017, Brill), and his postdoctoral research focus on the encounters and articulations of twentieth century anti-colonial resistance movements. He has published several articles and chapters on inter-war and post-war anti-imperialism, international communism and radicalism in journals and anthologies.

Holger Weiss

is professor of general history at Åbo Akademi University in Finland and visiting professor of history at Dalarna University, Sweden. He has published widely on African, global and Atlantic history, including *Between Accommodation and Revivalism: Muslims, the State and Society in Ghana from the Precolonial to the Postcolonial Era* (Finnish Oriental Society, 2008), *Framing a Radical African Atlantic. African American Agency, West African Intellectuals and the International Trade Union of Negro Workers* (Brill, 2014), (ed.) *Ports of Globalisation, Places of Creolisation: Nordic Possessions in the Atlantic World during the Era of the Slave Trade* (Brill, 2015) and *Slavhandel och slaveri under svensk flagg: Koloniala drömmar och verklighet i Afrika och Karibien 1770–1847* (Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 2016).

Transnational and Global Perspectives on International Communist Solidarity Organisations

Bernhard Bayerlein, Kasper Braskén and Holger Weiss

We want to build a holy alliance, we, the white, yellow, black and other oppressed people of different colours. The decisive question is not the colour of one's skin but the fact that one is an oppressed, a poor fellow [...].¹

This book provides an analysis of the articulation and organisation of radical international solidarity by so-called “Non-Party Mass Organisations” and “Sympathising Organisations for Special Purposes” that were either connected to or had been established by the Third or Communist International (Comintern), such as the International Red Aid, the International Workers' Relief, the League Against Imperialism, the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers.² The guiding light of these organisations was a radical interpretation of international solidarity, usually in combination with concepts and visions of gender, race and class as well as anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism and anti-fascism. All of these new transnational networks form a controversial part of the contemporary history of international organisations. In most cases, these organisations have been completely excluded from more recent research

-
- 1 “Wir wollen eine heilige Allianz bilden, wir, die weissen, gelben, schwarzen und andersfarbigen Unterdrückten. Nicht die Hautfarbe soll ausschlaggebend sein, sondern die Tatsache, dass man ein Unterdrückter, ein Armer ist [...]” Willi Münzenberg's speech at the Hände weg von China - Kongress, Berlin 1925, Minutes to the “Hände weg von China!” Congress in Berlin, 16.8.1925, RGASPI 514/1/164, 49–50. The acronym RGASPI stands for Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RSGAP), formerly Moscow's Center for the Preservation of Documents of Modern History (RTsKhIDNI). The RGASPI holds the files of the Comintern Archive.
 - 2 On the classification of the organisations under the umbrella of the Comintern in the light of new archival documents, see Bernhard H. Bayerlein, “Das neue Babylon. Strukturen und Netzwerke der Kommunistischen Internationale und ihre Klassifizierung”, *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (2004), pp. 181–270.

and have, thus, remained a hidden history of 20th century internationalism.³ Like the Comintern these international organisations had an ambiguous character that does not fit nicely into the traditional typologies of international organisations as they were neither international governmental organisations nor international non-governmental organisations (NGOs).⁴ They constituted a radical continuation of the pre-First World War Left and exemplified an attempt to implement the ideas and movements of a new type of radical international solidarity not only in Europe, but on a global scale.

Despite the profound ambiguity of the organisations for radical left-wing international solidarity it is argued in this book that they were in many respects significant predecessors to several post-1945 transnational solidarity organisations and NGOs. As claimed in Chapters 4 and 6 in the present volume, radical left-wing organisations that had been established by the German Communist Willi Münzenberg, such as the Internationale Arbeiterhilfe or the League Against Imperialism, developed and articulated a profound transnational perspective “from below”, i.e., not orchestrated by or in control of the Communist Parties, when it for example comes to the organisation of international solidarity campaigns, the uses of mass media, their global outlook and networking, and the staging of public spectacles for the mobilisation of support for the victims of oppression and injustices or for political prisoners. Previous attempts to analyse and categorise the radical left-wing international solidarity organisations have often limited themselves to the history of Soviet foreign policy, instead of analysing them as a part of a transnational world of the Left that was strongly embedded in the various national contexts and at the same time strongly entangled with the cultures of the international socialist and communist movement.⁵ Modern NGOs have often been described as the “conscience of the world”, constituting an important critical mass, exposing injustices, providing assistance to the poor of the world, and highlighting

3 These kind of organizations are not for example mentioned in Bob Reinalda, *Routledge History of International Organisations. From 1815 to the Present Day* (London: Routledge, 2009).

4 Brigitte Studer, *The Transnational World of the Cominternians* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 5.

5 See, for example, the influential studies by Jonathan Haslam, *Soviet Foreign Policy 1930–33: The Impact of Depression* (London and Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1983) and *The Soviet Union and the Threat from the East, 1933–41* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1992). For a different perspective, see Ken Post, *Revolution's Other World: Communism and the Periphery, 1917–39* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1997). Most profound was the incorporation of the Red International of Labour Unions into Soviet foreign policy, see Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2008), p. 264.

the destiny of political prisoners. The somewhat heroic aura of present-day NGOs is naturally to be taken critically, as they always have functioned in close collaboration with various state institutions.⁶ In the case of the organisations for radical international solidarity, their role as predecessors to contemporary movements has remained highly controversial, as during the interwar period they were regarded as being ominous adversaries to both the governments of Europe and to the various European global empires.

Radical International Solidarity

The term “solidarity” was first utilised in the sociological writings of Charles Fournier and Auguste Comte in the beginning of the 19th century. This was the starting point of a long sociological tradition in which “solidarity” has been one of the most central concepts. Examples par excellence are the classic works of Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Talcott Parsons. Solidarity was perceived as being the glue that keeps society together and Durkheim, for example, famously insisted that the nature of solidarity is the central research issue of sociology. On a theoretical level, the concept of solidarity is included in at least three different research contexts. Firstly, solidarity forms part of an academic discourse amongst social scientists and philosophers.⁷ Secondly, it is a central part of the Social Democratic and Socialist ideological discourse, generally referred to as “proletarian internationalism”.⁸ Thirdly, it is part of a Christian discourse on social ethics.⁹ Within both the second and third approaches, an

6 See further Bill Seary, “The Early History. From the Congress of Vienna to the San Francisco Conference”, in Peter Willetts (ed.), *“The Conscience of the World”. The Influence of Non-Governmental Organisations in the UN System* (London: Hurst & Company, 1996), pp. 16–17. A NGO is defined by Peter Willetts as a “... non-profit-making, non-violent, organised group of people who are not seeking governmental office”. Peter Willetts, “Introduction”, in Willetts (ed.), *“The Conscience of the world”*, pp. 1–5, 10–11.

7 Sven-Eric Liedman, *Att se sig själv i andra. Om solidaritet* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1999), pp. 16–17; Rainer Zoll, *Was ist Solidarität heute?* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), pp. 26–33; Aafke E. Komter, *Social Solidarity and the Gift* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 2, 103; Thomas Fiegle, *Von der Solidarité zur Solidarität – Ein französisch-deutscher Begriffstransfer* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2003).

8 van der Linden, *Workers of the World*, pp. 259–261.

9 Steinar Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe. The History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 21. See further: Jeffrey Odell Korgen, *Solidarity Will Transform the World. Stories of Hope from Catholic Relief Services* (New York: Orbis Books, 2007); Peter Baldwin, *The Politics of Social Solidarity. Class Bases of the European Welfare State 1875–1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

“institutionalised form of solidarity” functions as a legitimate expression of the social feeling of belonging, most clearly expressed within the nation state, and expressing a will to co-operate and a strive for order. By extension, both Socialist/Social Democratic and Catholic articulations of solidarity have belonged mainly to this category. Similar feelings of belonging, though more apolitical, were the expressions of solidarity within the peace and women’s movements.¹⁰

In contrast to the two aforementioned expressions, a radical version of the articulation of international solidarity developed during the interwar period, parallel to a moderate, state-centred position. On a political level, the idea of radical international solidarity expressed dissent and conflict and challenged the prevailing political and societal order in Europe, also questioning the legitimacy of the European empires. The 1919 Versailles Peace Treaty had separated Germany from its colonies, but at the same time blessed the powers of the victorious empires, making, for example, the British Empire larger than it ever had been. From the perspective of Empire, radical international solidarity became a dangerous idea which eroded the loyalty of the colonial subjects and supported their calls for national liberation. The loyalty and solidarity articulated for the sustaining of Empire was delegitimised and challenged “from below” as it perceived the oppressed in the West as being the natural allies of the colonial liberation struggles.¹¹ Consequently, solidarity in Europe cannot only be perceived as being an idea creating harmony and order, but an idea that by definition has implied the creation of social conflicts in a number of European and global spaces and places. A further characteristic of European solidarity is

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- 10 Cecelia Lynch, *Beyond Appeasement: Interpreting Interwar Peace Movements in World Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); Michael C. Pugh, *Liberal Internationalism. The Interwar Movement for Peace in Britain* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Marie Sandell, *The Rise of Women’s Transnational Activism. Identity and Sisterhood Between the World Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015); Dieter Riesenber, *Geschichte der Friedensbewegung in Deutschland. Von den Anfängen bis 1933* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985); Meredith Tax, *The Rising of the Women. Feminist Solidarity and Class Conflict, 1880–1917* (New York: Monthly Press, 1980); Werner Thönnessen, *The Emancipation of Women. The Rise and Decline of the Women’s Movement in German Social Democracy 1868–1933* (London: Pluto Press, 1976).
 - 11 Nathalie Karagiannis, “Introduction. Solidarity in Europe – Politics, religion, knowledge”, in Nathalie Karagiannis (ed.), *European Solidarity* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), pp. 1–8. Niall Ferguson, *Empire. How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 314–316; Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier (eds.), *Competing Visions of World Order. Global Moments and Movements, 1880s–1930s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); and Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment. Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

that it has most often been understood as solidarity within Europe, or alternatively as a solidarity of Europe in relation to its closest neighbours. This poses a particular challenge of outmost significance to the analysis of past expressions of European international solidarity.¹² Thus, while Socialist or Catholic visions of international solidarity were mainly Eurocentric and exclusive during the interwar period, although with certain exceptions,¹³ radical articulations were by contrast global and inclusive in the sense that they stressed global racial and gender equality – or expressed the will for it at least on a theoretical level. As the opening citation by the German communist Wilhelm “Willi” Münzenberg illustrates, the radical international solidarity organisations articulated a message that supported by the original message of the October Revolution imagined the formation of a radical alliance beyond Eurocentric models and embraced a new global alliance of the oppressed and that clearly distinguished these movements from all other forms of solidarity or humanitarianism articulated during the interwar period. The new identification was “not only generally humanistic”, but was political and ideational more than anything else, like the commitment of women in the Spanish civil war,¹⁴ pointing towards what David Featherstone has termed as “solidarity as a universalizing relation”.¹⁵

Radical International Solidarity and Humanitarianism during the Interwar Period

The problem of solidarity has been the theme of several major studies, but the understanding of interwar radical expressions of solidarity are still largely unknown. Research has tracked the changing meaning and usage of “solidarity”, and highlighted that after the Second World War the uses of the concept of “solidarity” in the political language has been distinguished by over-usage. Ever since 1945, the concept of “solidarity” has been utilised excessively by Social

12 Nathalie Karagiannis, “European Solidarity with ‘the Rest of the World’”, in Karagiannis (ed.), *European Solidarity*, pp. 214–216.

13 Fritjof Tichelmann, “Socialist ‘Internationalism’ and the Colonial World. Practical Colonial Policies of Social Democracy in Western Europe before 1940 with Particular Reference to the Dutch SDAP”, in Frits van Holthoon & Marcel van der Linden (ed.), *Internationalism in the Labour Movement 1830–1940* (Leiden: Brill, 1988).

14 Avgust Lesnik, Ksenija Vidmar Horvat, “The Spanish Female Volunteers from Yugoslavia as Example of Solidarity in a Transatlantic Context”, *The International Newsletter of Communist Studies* 27 (2014/2015), forthcoming.

15 David Featherstone, *Solidarity: Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism* (London & New York: Zed Books, 2012), p. 37.

Democratic and Christian parties, in governmental statutes, in the EU and in every kind of organisation and society. Steinar Stjernø argues that, as a result, the concept of “solidarity” has in the process been redefined and remodelled into a modern Social Democratic idea of solidarity based on “ethics, feelings of reciprocal responsibility, recognition of interdependence, or the feeling of belonging together”. Solidarity today is, therefore, not primarily understood as being an expression of class interests as it was primarily understood before the Second World War, but as a significant concept that ideally includes the whole of humanity, uniting people around the globe in transnational co-operation.¹⁶

Studies into solidarity have mainly been either theoretical or restricted to an ahistorical analysis, based on political, social or moral philosophy where the central question has often been the role of solidarity in the (post)modern society.¹⁷ During the past centuries, the concept of “solidarity” has described a broad repertoire of phenomena beginning from simply “giving to a beggar to organised worker solidarity, from offering help to our neighbour to walking in a silent march, from doing volunteer work to global networking”.¹⁸ A modern definition of solidarity could be described as “the willingness to share resources in order to support those who are struggling or in need of aid”.¹⁹ Still, the definition of solidarity is indistinct, which has had its perfect function within the field of political or religious rhetoric. Significantly, radical solidarity is clearly distinguished from charity and humanitarianism. Whereas philanthropy is defined as being a temporary goodwill shown by the rich to the poor, the interwar articulations of radical solidarity expressed a solidarity and unity based on reciprocity between the oppressed, led by a relatively small group of activists. On several levels, radical international solidarity has functioned as a powerful utopian aspiration both in Europe and globally, promising liberation, emancipation and social justice. It has, however, never been merely a question of visualisation or rhetoric, but actual attempts to implement utopian aspirations within Europe. There was a strong belief that international solidarity was something more than symbolical words of sympathy, that radical articulations of solidarity required compassion, empathy and action in support of those who were oppressed and in need of solidarity. These radical articulations

16 Zoll, *Was ist Solidarität heute?*, p. 15. Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe*, pp. 165–185; A. Wildt, “Solidarität”, in J. Ritter & K. Gründer (ed.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (Darmstadt: Schwabe Verlag, 1996), p. 1006.

17 Komter, *Social Solidarity and the Gift*, pp. 3, 5. See also the discussion in Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe*, pp. 20–21; and the survey by Wildt, “Solidarität”.

18 Komter, *Social Solidarity and the Gift*, p. 12.

19 Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe*, p. 2.

demanded action and the providing of real material support for those leading an active resistance against unjust structures of capitalism, imperialism, and racism.²⁰

Historically, the most conspicuous expression of solidarity has been the institutionalised forms of solidarity, expressed through the labour movement.²¹ It would, however, be a mistake to understand the expressions and organisations of international solidarity in interwar Europe as a phenomena only related to labour, socialist, working class or proletarian internationalism. This limited and outdated understanding of internationalism has already been studied in general accounts of the Socialist, Communist and Trotskyist internationals.²²

The point of reference for an analysis of international solidarity produced by radical organisations of international solidarity during the inter-war

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- 20 Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams. Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Frank E. Manuel & Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979); Rosabeth Moss Kanter, "Commitment and Social Organisation. A Study of Commitment Mechanisms in Utopian Communities", *American Sociological Review* 33:4 (1968). See further the outline by Charlotte Alston, "Transnational Solidarities and the Politics of the Left 1890–1990 – Introduction", *European Review of History–Revue européenne d'histoire* 21:4 (2014), pp. 447–450.
 - 21 Sinclair Armstrong, "The Internationalism of the Early Social Democrats of Germany", *American Historical Review* 47:2 (1942); J.E.S. Hayward, "Solidarity. The Social History of an Idea in Nineteenth Century France", *International Review of Social History* 4:2 (1959), pp. 261–284; van der Linden, *Workers of the World*, esp. pp. 266–280.
 - 22 Classic studies include Kevin McDermott & Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern. A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996); Mikhail Narinsky & Jürgen Rojahn (eds.), *Centre and Periphery. The History of the Comintern in the Light of New Documents* (Amsterdam: International Institute of Social History, 1996); Milorad M. Drachkovitch (ed.), *The Revolutionary Internationals, 1864–1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966); James Joll, *The Second International 1889–1914* (New York: Praeger, 1956); Reiner Tosstorff, *Profintern. Die Rote Gewerkschaftsinternationale 1920–1937* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004); Hans Gottfurcht, *Die internationale Gewerkschaftsbewegung im Weltgeschehen. Geschichte, Probleme, Aufgaben* (Köln: Bund-Verlag, 1962); Robert J. Alexander, *International Trotskyism. 1929–1985. A Documented Analysis of the Movement* (London: Duke University Press, 1991); Alexander Vatlin, *Die Komintern. Gründung, Programmatik, Akteure, Geschichte des Kommunismus und Linkssozialismus* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2009); Julius Braunthal, *History of the International 1914–1943, vol. 2* (London: Thomas Nelson and sons Ltd., 1967); Günther Nollau, *Die Internationale. Wurzeln und Erscheinungsformen des proletarischen Internationalismus* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1959).

period is a multi-dimensional understanding of space and time.²³ Solidarity is defined in the words of David Featherstone as a “transformative relation” meaning that solidarities being forged are the result of the active creation of new ways of relating between both old and new places, activists, and social groups. Significantly, this indicates the possibility of forming solidarities “from below” by working-class groups and movements, which shows that subaltern groups being oppressed have had the possibility to construct new practices of solidarity.²⁴ Unimagined opportunities for international non-governmental action became available after 1918, alongside also bitter critique. Humanitarian, anti-war and international solidarity movements found fertile soil in the social and political milieu of the inter-war era. The ending of the First World War in 1918 supported by the transnational dynamics of the October revolution, mixed with a sense of general unrest and uncertainty (unemployment, the fragile state of the parliamentary system in several countries, attempted revolutions in Germany, Hungary, etc.) in the European countries, left room for individuals and organisations to establish new networks and platforms of radical left-wing international solidarity after the devastating collapse of the Second International in 1914.²⁵

These new transnational connections within and beyond Europe can be distinguished by the number of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) which had almost tripled by 1930, compared to the numbers before the outbreak of the First World War (from 135 to 370). As Iriye rightly concludes, the INGOs of the time were making significant international interconnections in the fields of cultural and social internationalism, as these involved questions and problem areas that stood outside the national paradigm, which required international solutions.²⁶ Moreover, the inter-war period witnessed

23 Peter Waterman, *Globalization, Social Movements and the New Internationalisms* (London: Mansell, 1998), p. 208.

24 Featherstone, *Solidarity*, p. 5.

25 Georges Haupt, *Socialism and the Great War. The Collapse of the Second International* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972); Karl-Heinz Klär, *Der Zusammenbruch der Zweiten Internationale* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 1981); R. Craig Nation, *War on War: Lenin, the Zimmerwald Left, and the Origins of Communist Internationalism* (London: Duke University Press, 1989).

26 Akira Iriye, *Global Community. The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 20–30. See also: David Held et al., *Global Transformations. Politics, Economics and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), pp. 423–424; F.S.L. Lyons, *Internationalism in Europe 1815–1914, European Aspects* (Leyden: A.W. Sythoff, 1963).

the establishment of major international and transnational if not global organisations, e.g. the League of Nations, the International Labour Organisation and, last but not least, the Comintern.²⁷

Alongside these organisations, the development of international humanitarian organisations is of crucial importance. Although the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Geneva Conventions had been formed during the 1860s, few advances had been made in the field of humanitarianism prior to the outbreak of the First World War. During and after this war, a number of international organisations of a new kind were created, including Save the Children, the Nansen Relief Organisation, the High Commission for Refugees and the International Relief Union. Other organisations working internationally included the American Relief Agency (ARA) and the Quakers. With good reason, the First World War has been defined as the point of origin for modern humanitarianism, although this primarily was a humanitarianism limited to the Western world. This modern form of humanitarianism was distinguished by its new transnational networks (or the transnationalisation of humanitarianism), its increasing secular basis, and the professionalisation of humanitarian action. However, the global involvement of most NGOs is dated to the post-World War II era in the context of decolonisation. As Barnett declares, it was only after World War II that “humanitarianism went global”.²⁸ By contrast, however, the international organisations for radical solidarity went global already after 1919, almost three decades before the humanitarian initiatives. This fact would appear to be of central historical significance for the long history of 20th century international NGOs, and for the forming of the contemporary global community and civil society.

An emerging global political consciousness was nurtured by a network of organisations and institutions which provided an alternative source of information of local events around the world, spread to the masses of Europe already during the 1920s. Hence, for the first time distant atrocities and humanitarian

27 Paul Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man. The United Nations and the Quest for World Government* (London: Penguin Books, 2007); F.S. Northedge, *The League of Nations. Its Life and Times 1920–1946* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1986); Antony Alcock, *History of the International Labour Organisation* (London: Macmillan, 1971); Daniel Laqua (ed.), *Internationalism Reconfigured. Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

28 Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity. A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), pp. 1–2, 21, 82–83, 118; Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918–1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 3–7.

crises were being presented on a broad scale to the European public by radical international solidarity organisations which, through their utopian aspirations, strove to make use of local events in order to construct a global political consciousness in Europe. Also, a critical reflection amongst European intellectuals and political activists on the political and economic rights of the subjects in the European colonies formed the basis of an emerging critique of the colonial order, and laid the basis for various forms of civil rights movements and anti-colonial activities both in Europe and in the colonies, which after 1945 resulted in the gradual dissolution of the European colonial empires.²⁹

Central solidarity issues which motivated transnational interconnections between significant social movements both within Europe and within the (North) Atlantic world during the inter-war period included alongside minority, religious and ethnic issues, the peace movement, gender issues epitomised by the women's movement and the conception and development of the pan-European project. All of these social movements and their founding visions of the future of Europe and of the world were essential for the further development of the modern European project.³⁰

On the other hand, the global and transnational perspective was always an integral part of the radical expressions of international solidarity. However, what Northern white and usually male agents of international solidarity perceived as a politically radical version of "proletarian internationalism", non-European subaltern activists rightly challenged such notions as gendered and racist, i.e., to propagate for a Western/Northern male paternalistic version of international solidarity. The subaltern critique resulted into a fusion of cosmopolitanism and internationalism, for example political Pan-Africanism and Black Internationalism which engaged Black activists throughout the African Atlantic in places such as New York, London, Paris, Marseilles or Accra during the 1930s.³¹

29 See also the important discussion in Susan D. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

30 Lars Magnusson & Bo Stråth, "Introduction. A Social Polity? Challenges to European Inequalities", in Lars Magnusson & Bo Stråth (eds.), *European Solidarities. Tensions and Contentions of a Concept* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 11–18.

31 Featherstone, *Solidarity*, pp. 40–54, 99–109. See further Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 2003), and Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917–1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

Global Aspects of Radical International Solidarity during the Inter-war Period

The inter-war era forms a problematic time frame for popular social movements based on international solidarity due to the Left's bitter split. However, beyond the party bases, trade unions and labour internationals developed a set of radical international solidarity organisations which attempted to mobilise the masses and prominent intellectuals through a public struggle against experienced inequalities both nationally and internationally.³² In an era when political parties and trade unions were confronted with the dilemma of the Socialist/Communist split and bitter fight over the masses of Europe, there developed alternative international organisations which operated in local, national and international contexts through their message of international solidarity. These NGOs, albeit with clear political and religious profiles and/or agendas, were organisations that were attempting to form a unity based on a kind of *überparteilichkeit* ("beyond party politics"), focusing on social issues and problems that were beyond party politics. Such issues were connected to the general European social landscape and civil society which included the fight against war and imperialism, the situation of the poor, national and international humanitarian crises and perceived injustices occurring not only in Europe, but globally. Radical international solidarity was skilfully articulated, linking together emancipatory visions regarding gender, race, class, human rights, national liberation movements and pacifism. These radical NGOs had the mission to "awaken" the slumbering masses around the entire world, be they workers or colonial subjects, and to unite them for easily identifiable common causes, against a common adversary.

Among these forgotten pioneers, in the realm of alternative European social movements, were such organisations as the Internationale Arbeiterhilfe (IAH, International Workers' Relief), the League Against Imperialism (LAI), the Weltkomitee gegen Krieg und Faschismus (World Committee Against War and Fascism) and the Welthilfskomitee für die Opfer des Hitlerfaschismus (World Relief Committee for the Victims of German Fascism), and more loosely associated networks such as the Zukunft-group, the weekly organ of the

32 Christine Collette, *The International Faith: Labour's Attitude to European Socialism, 1918–39* (Aldershot: Ashgate 1998); Pamela M. Graves and Helmut Gruber, *Women and Socialism. Socialism and Women: Europe between the Two World Wars* (New York: Berghahn, 1998); Richard Hyman, "Agitation, organization, byråkrati, diplomati: motsägelsefulla strategier i den internationella arbetarrörelsen," *Arbetarhistoria* 109–110:1–2 (2004), pp. 16–27.

suggests that a radical new development took place in the 1960s and 1970s, with “new” social movements emerging during the Cold War era, effectively distinguished from the “old” social movements, which embraced “organisational innovations”, realised and used the power of the mass media and, thirdly, became global. According to most social scientists, typical issues embraced by these “new” movements have included the various women’s, peace and human rights issues. What seems hitherto to have eluded most of the social movement research is that all of these aspects, both organisational and issue-related, were already in extensive use during the inter-war era, launched by a number of innovative international NGOs, which formed the basis for alternative social movements symbolic for Europe’s 20th Century.³⁷

An analysis of radical left-wing international solidarity organisations during the inter-war period necessarily transcends a Eurocentric perspective. By breaking with nationalism as a methodological paradigm (i.e. bordered nation-states as naturalised units of analysis), the transnational approach highlights both local and global encounters and also illuminates previously ignored frictions, ideas, currents, patterns, and networks, all enacted in spaces that were crucial in developing responses against oppressive structures.³⁸ A transnational history of radical international solidarity is concerned with cross-national connections constructed by individuals, non-national identities, and non-state actors. Expressions of radical international solidarity during the inter-war period were part of a connected and global political community in the making, as critical studies into transnational movements and global radicalism have highlighted.³⁹ Last, but not least, such an approach can unearth the hidden subaltern voices and spaces of international solidarity during the interwar period.

Socialism. The West European Left in the Twentieth Century (New York: The New Press, 1996).

- 37 Robin Cohen & Shirin M. Rai, “Global Social Movements. Towards a Cosmopolitan Politics”, in Robin Cohen & Shirin M. Rai (eds.), *Global Social Movements* (London: Athlone Press, 2000), pp. 4–9; Ronaldo Munck, “Labour in the Global. Challenges and Prospects”, in Cohen & Rai (eds.), *Global Social Movements*, pp. 87–92; Manfred B. Steger, *The Rise of the Global Imaginary. Political Ideologies from the French Revolution to the Global War on Terror* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 105–113.
- 38 Akira Iriye, *Global and Transnational History. The Past, the Present and the Future* (Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan 2013).
- 39 See further Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism. An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Iriye, *Global Community*; Eley, *Forging Democracy*; Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations. A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007); Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of ’68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976* (Oxford 2007); Laqua (ed.), *Internationalism Reconfigured*.

Their major critique was the “class-before-race” proletarian internationalism of the Comintern and the Red International of Labour Unions and the other Non-Party Mass and Sympathising Organisations organisations, not to mention the lack of interest in anti-colonial and anti-imperial agitation by the Socialist and Christian international solidarity organisations. Organisations such as the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers eventually failed to create spaces of multiethnic organising and solidarity.⁴⁰

Spaces and Places of Radical International Solidarity

Inspired by recent critical studies into globalisation and global, transnational history,⁴¹ an analysis of some of the Non-Party Mass and Sympathising Organisations under the umbrella of the Comintern aims to re-examine the spaces and spatial articulations of radicalism.⁴² Drawing on Featherstone’s interpretation of resistance, space, and political identities in the making of counter-global networks, histories and geographies of subaltern political activity are not isolated to locally fixed places and contexts. Here, the subaltern includes marginalised and interlinked groups subordinated on the basis of class, gender, ethnicity and race. The mobilisation of these groups as political subjects forms a prominent part in anti-fascist, anti-colonial and anti-racist articulations and expressions of radical international solidarity both during and after the inter-war period.⁴³

40 Featherstone, *Solidarity*, pp. 88–98. See further Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919–1939* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2013), Christian Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), and Christian Høgsbjerg, *Mariner, Renegade & Castaway – Chris Braithwaite: Seamen’s Organiser, Socialist and Militant Pan-Africanist* (London: Socialist History Society & Redwoods, 2014).

41 Jürgen Osterhammel, Jürgen, *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (München: C.H. Beck 2009); Heinrich August Winkler, *Geschichte des Westens. Die Zeit der Weltkriege 1914–1945* (München: C.H. Beck, 2011); Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed. European International History 1919–1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Zara Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark. European International History 1933–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Emily Rosenberg (ed.), *A World Connecting, 1870–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Akira Iriye (ed.), *A History of the World – Global Interdependence: The World after 1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

42 Young, *Postcolonialism*; Prashad, *The Darker Nations*; Featherstone, *Solidarity*.

43 Featherstone, David, *Resistance, Space and Political Identities. The Making of Counter-Global Networks* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2008).

Organisations and activists created radical spaces of resistance but their activities have largely been neglected or downplayed in the political history of globalisation during the inter-war period. Although articulations of resistance were established locally, they were in fact entangled and interconnected through networks that transcended place-based politics, a perspective generally neglected in previous research. A transnational and global approach enables an analysis of the varieties of radical international solidarity that were articulated by transnational organisations and border-crossing actors.⁴⁴

The theoretical tools and insights of inter-sectionality provide an additional perspective in the re-evaluation of the political and cultural spaces of radical international solidarity and the way in which class, gender, ethnicity and race were constructed and brought into play along overlapping transnational and global processes.⁴⁵ Such an analysis presents the articulation and organisation of radical international solidarity during the inter-war period as a parallel meta-narrative to the dominant discourse of the rise of totalitarian systems.⁴⁶ Analogous to David Featherstone's notions on spatiality, expressions of radical international solidarity during the inter-war period are alternative, if not counter-narratives, of social and political representations of space. In contrast to the places and spaces of the inter-war nation states, organisations promoting radical international solidarity had a global, anti-racial, anti-Fascist and anti-colonial agenda. However, while the message and agenda were global, the activities and organisations were local, resulting in the emergence of multiple hubs or "portals of globalisation" of radical international solidarity.⁴⁷ The global ambitions of the Comintern were, nevertheless, often in a constant conflict with local realities, and the global agenda set by the Comintern at times made very little sense in the local spaces and

44 See further Michael G. Müller and Cornelius Torp, "Conceptualising Transnational Spaces in History", *European Review of History – Revue européenne d'histoire* 16:5 (2009), pp. 609–617; Bernhard Struck, Kate Ferris and Jacques Revel, "Introduction: Space and Scale in Transnational History", *The International History Review* 33:4 (2011), pp. 573–584.

45 Nira Yuval-Davies, *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations* (London: Sage 2011); Angela R. Wilson (ed.), *Situating Intersectionality: Politics, Policy, and Power* (Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan 2013).

46 See David Featherstone, "Black Internationalism, International Communism and Anti-Fascist Political Trajectories: African American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War", *Twentieth Century Communism – A Journal of International History*, Issue 7: Exiles and Diasporas (2014), pp. 9–40.

47 Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann, "Global History and the Spatial Turn: From the Impact of Area Studies to the Study of Critical Junctures of Globalization", *Journal of Global History* 5 (2010), pp. 149–170.

places of the rank-and-file Communists. As Häberlen argues, the global was embedded in the local, not only in the form of a “world army” of willing Communist cadres, but much more in the cultural and social practises of international solidarity which at times could also articulate a resistance against both the Comintern’s official internationalism and every form of authority. Consequently, radical international solidarity was constituted through multiple and differentiated political and cultural practices. Thus, only through the inclusion of the network between the local and the global is it possible to understand radical international solidarity, and how it was articulated in various global/local histories.⁴⁸

This book analyses the multiple places and spaces of radical left-wing international solidarity. Geographically, we move between central hubs of transnational radical solidarity movements during the inter-war period, such as Moscow, Berlin, Hamburg as well as the various centres of anti-colonial, anti-Fascist and anti-racist resistance movements in Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin and North America. Semantically, rhetorically and practically, a parallel space of radical left-wing international solidarity was constructed and articulated on a general level surrounding the Comintern (see Chapter 2) and via its Non-Party Mass and Sympathising Organisations such as the International Red Aid (see Chapters 1 and 3), the International Workers’ Relief (see Chapter 4), and the League Against Imperialism (see Chapter 5). The Red International of Labour Unions, itself part of the Comintern, established also several peripheral bodies, such as the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (see Chapter 6) and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (see Chapter 7). The anthology looks at comparative research on the topic of transnational and international solidarity movements in the inter-war period, as a contribution to the analysis of transnational and international organisations. Its historical-empirical contributions and case studies comprise a great diversity of topics and create a vivid image of a special type of radical networks and organisations which were set up during the inter-war period, their activities in different regions and periods as well as their complex relations to the Soviet Union and Stalinism.⁴⁹

48 Joachim C. Häberlen, “Between Global Aspirations and Local Realities. The Global Dimensions of Interwar Communism”, *Journal of Global History* 7:3 (2012), pp. 415–437.

49 Bayerlein, Bernhard H., “Deutscher Kommunismus und transnationaler Stalinismus. Komintern, KPD und Sowjetunion 1929–1943. Neue Dokumente zur Konzeptualisierung einer verbundenen Geschichte”, in Weber, Drabkin, Bayerlein, *Deutschland-Russland-Komintern. I.* pp. 225–400.

Bernhard H. Bayerlein's chapter opens our discussion by providing a differentiated overview of the Comintern's definition of Non-Party Mass and Sympathising Organisations for Special Purposes. He suggests a typological classification in five main groups of transnational organisations and networks based on their articulations, practices and intersectional and transcultural areas of activities. Also, he highlights the special combinatory modes of articulation of the "Münzenberg-Networks". In addition, he discusses historical turning points, places and spaces, actors and concepts of solidarity, what he frames as an ideal-typical example of an anticipated Cultural International in the sense of Walter Benjamin's "Dream houses of modernity" which finally was doomed to fail under Stalinism.

By means of an outline of the history of the Comintern based on new results of historical communist studies, Bayerlein reconstructs the process of parallelisation and synchronisation between the Comintern, the All-Russian Communist Party and the national Communist parties from 1919 to 1943. This finally allows a comparative and transnational analysis of the raise and fall of this "intermediate empire" as one element within this threefold sphere of power, which finally proved incompatible with Stalinism.

Gleb Albert provides an outline of activities of the hitherto little studied Soviet section of the International Red Aid known under the acronym MOPR. This organisation was larger than any other "voluntary society" in the Soviet Union, with a membership of 8 million in 1930. In contrast to other Soviet "mass societies", the MOPR's objective was the propagation of practical international solidarity. This chapter analyses the role the MOPR within Soviet power structures, in particular its troubled inter-relations with the Communist Party. After providing an overview of the MOPR's activities through which it attempted to involve its members in international solidarity, this chapter tackles the question of how far this organisation with its internationalist agenda succeeded in embedding itself into Soviet society and forming part of a new Soviet public, as well as the question of the various transformations internationalism had to undergo after the onset of Stalinism and its nationalised agenda.

Kasper Braskén's first chapter analyses the global agenda of the Internationale Arbeiterhilfe (IAH, International Workers' Relief) as a significant case study of an international organisation of the inter-war era which had unparalleled opportunities in which to develop new global networks and identifications. Although the IAH was a Beyond- or Non-Party Organisation and Sympathising Organisation under the umbrella of the Comintern, its headquarters were never located in Moscow, but in Berlin (1921–1933) and Paris (1933–1935). From there, the IAH created a message of international solidarity that was never

restricted to a European solidarity. Instead, it specifically promoted the idea of an international solidarity which extended from West to East and from North to South. During the early 1930s, the IAH's network linked together most parts of the world as IAH bureaus (either legal or clandestine) were established all around the globe. Thus, the IAH was in the very frontline of a globalising world in its efforts to create solidarity within the transnational workers' community. Most significantly, the IAH was not only an organisation promoting a symbolical solidarity, but was also an organisation of practical solidarity work, often providing provisions during strikes and natural disasters. *Kasper Braskén's second chapter* analyses the problems and prospects of putting radical international solidarity into practice in the context of the British miners' and general strike of 1926. Although internationalism was the symbol of the Communist parties, Braskén highlights how national issues and campaigns competed and challenged the calls for radical international solidarity articulated by international organisations such as the International Workers' Relief. Here, the Comintern's global aspirations often collided with or were inconsistent with local realities and needs, thus exposing the limits of radical solidarity.

Fredrik Petersson presents a discussion of anti-imperialism and the global ambitions of the League Against Imperialism and for National Independence (LAI). The LAI was established at the "First International Congress Against Colonialism and Imperialism" in Brussels on 10–14 February 1927, and had Berlin (the "global village of the Comintern") as its operative centre (International Secretariat) from 1927 to 1933 before it was moved to Paris (1933), and finally transferred to London (1933–1937). The primary aim of the LAI was to function and act as a "neutral intermediary" for the Comintern from "imperialist centres" in the Western world to the colonies. In the guise of posing as a "sympathising organisation", the LAI declared its support of the colonial liberation struggle. Partly fulfilling the obligation as an interwar platform for anti-imperialist objectives, partly contributing to the Comintern's vision of "building bridges" between labour movements in the "imperialist nations" and oppressed colonial peoples, the LAI assumed a nostalgic point of reference for the continuance of anti-imperialist movements after its dissolution in 1937. The chapter addresses questions such as nostalgia, aspects of interpreting "sympathising organisations" and the communist "solar system", different theoretical and methodological perspectives in the interpretation of the LAI as a historical object, and historiography as modes of understanding the LAI as a concerted source of inspiration for decolonization movements in the post-war era, for example, the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung 1955.

Holger Weiss' two chapters address the articulation of radical international solidarity of two organisations of the Red International of Labour Unions (the RILU, also known by its Russian acronym as Profintern), namely the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (ISH) and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW). Both organisations had been established as a result of the "class against class" strategy that were to mark the global strategy of the Comintern and RILU during the "Third Period". The rationale behind this policy was the belief in Moscow that the former policy of a "united front from below" had failed and the Communists were to form so-called revolutionary opposition groups within labour unions dominated by the Social Democrats. Officially presented as being radical and independent platforms, the ITUCNW was for a short time promoted as a Black International while the ISH was designed to challenge the hegemony of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) as well as the various national waterfront labour unions. However, the Comintern soon dropped its plan for a Black International and re-designed the organisation to become its agitation and propaganda vehicle in the Black Atlantic. The ISH's global objective, on the other hand, remained unchanged, the plan being to transform existing opposition groups into independent radical unions and to establish independent radical platforms for these organisations.

The organisations and networks presented in the anthology show a number of mass-based global movements which may be summarised as "transnational solidarity organisations" in both chronological, systematical and spatial dimensions, on five continents, with epicentres in Western Europe and the Soviet Union. New documents shed new light not only on their transnational and often global ties as well as the political decision-making processes "from above" (mostly within the power triangle of the Soviet Union, the Comintern and the national Communist parties) but also on the commitment and the mobilisation processes "from below". They also show a new style of politics based on mobilisations, campaigns, demonstrations, the use of mass media and a wide range of activities which had an impact on society. Perhaps the most intrinsic example of this was the Internationale Arbeiterhilfe (IAH) (in Britain known as the Workers' International Relief (WIR)) which, largely due to the organisational genius of the German Communist Willi Münzenberg and his entourage, created an innovative form of transnational networks based on a unique combination of politics, media and culture, which was aimed to be put into practice in a propagandistic form.

Combined together, these characteristics make these international solidarity organisations a central part of subaltern internationalism and transcultural

global history. When combined together they formed the “world’s largest international mass-based political and social movement” of the inter-war period.⁵⁰ In most cases, this narrative follows the transformation process from its mostly improvised beginnings in the 1920s, through their “golden age” (approx. 1925–1933) until the crisis years of the 1930s, and the subsequent dissolution or liquidation of most of these organisations under Stalinism.

The important influx of new members, along with several other historical and charismatic events which became landmarks of the history of the Left, led to the formation of a heterogeneous cultural-esthetical “Intermediate Empire” (Karl Schlögel) as part of the life-worlds⁵¹ within or at the margins of the political parties opposing early capitalist and imperial globalisation – which after the 19th century centred around Social Democracy, and after WW1 mostly centred around the Comintern. Due to their impressive global spatial dispersion, which becomes evident in the studies presented in this anthology, it is possible to designate these organisations in their whole by the ideal-typical notion of an anticipated (and mostly imagined and finally failed) “Cultural International”.

Envisioning certain of these so-called beyond-party and “sympathising organisations” as institutional networks and transnational social movements beyond the nation state in a variety of forms, research into them involves the fields of social movements, international organisations, political sociology, Communist and Socialist studies, global history, network research, collective memory and critical social theory. This topic also encompasses cross-cultural studies and cultural transfers, the history of the Soviet Union, African history, the history of de-colonisation and post-colonial critiques.

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50 Kevin J. Callahan used this characteristic for the international Socialist movement by 1914. See: Kevin J. Callahan, *Demonstration Culture. European Socialism and the Second International, 1889–1914* (Leicester: Troubadour Publishing Limited, 2010), p. 292.

51 The reference to the notion of „Zwischenreich“ is Karl Schlögel, *Berlin Ostbahnhof. Russen und Deutsche in ihrem Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Siedler, 1998), p. 152; see also: Karl Schlögel, “Über Räume und Register der Geschichtsschreibung. Ein Gespräch mit Karl Schlögel”, *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History, Online-Ausgabe*, 1 (2004), H. 3, <http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/3-2004/id=4680>.

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The “Cultural International” as the Comintern’s Intermediate Empire: International Mass and Sympathizing Organisations beyond Parties

Bernhard H. Bayerlein

The History of Communism and the Ambiguity of the Comintern

Ever since the publication of the Communist Manifesto in 1848, the question of the social, political and cultural significance of Communism, its subsequent transformations and its integration into the world system, have been and continue to be among the most crucial debates within both the political and social sciences as well as the humanities.¹ Just like the current debate on globalisation, the issue of continuities and changes is crucial to the understanding of international solidarity organisations. The transformations of the Communist movement explain many of the operational changes within these organisations. In a larger sense, they can be seen as being as part of the social movement within the turbulent transformations of the Communist framework and its “general line”. The changing relations within a field of power determined by Soviet politics on the one hand, and the Comintern and the national Communist parties and their local milieus on the other, must be scrutinised in order to explain their particular dependence and this outcome, especially in relation to the topic of international revolution.²

On an ideological and symbolic level, the Comintern was three things at the same time: a contemporary expression of Labour internationalism, a concrete platform from which to globalise the October Revolution, and the promoter

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- 1 Concerning the economic analysis, the breakdown of classical party Communism proved to be the definitive failure of the model of recovering modernisation for these regimes. See: Immanuel Wallerstein, *Social Science and the Communist Interlude, or Interpretations of Contemporary History*, ISA Regional Colloquium, “Building Open Society and Perspectives of Sociology in East-Central Europe,” Krakow, Poland, Sept. 15–17, 1996. <http://fbc.binghamton.edu/iwpoland.htm>; cf. Armin Stickler, *Nichtregierungsorganisationen, soziale Bewegungen und Global Governance. Eine kritische Bestandsaufnahme* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2005), in particular pp. 13f.
 - 2 Andreas Hilger (ed.), *Die Sowjetunion und die Dritte Welt. UdSSR, Staatsozialismus und Antikolonialismus im Kalten Krieg 1945–1991* (München: Oldenbourg, 2009), p. 7.

of a vision of the Soviet Union as being a new Icaria leading to European and world revolution. It was a Workers' "Third International" as well as a tool used by the Bolsheviks and international Communists to globalise the Bolshevik Revolution as part of the imminent European and world revolution.³ Reflecting an ambiguous dual picture of universal brotherhood and bureaucratic Babylon, it directly opposed the League of Nations, the Versailles System, the creation of new national states and the new world order resulting from WWI. As a tightly-knit bureaucratic institution undermined by Stalinism (this is how George Orwell described the second face of the Comintern), it became one of the multiple Soviet "channels" which were used to exert pressure on governmental state structures around the world.⁴

3 For some comprehensive titles on the history of the Communist International, see: Pierre Broué, *Histoire de l'Internationale Communiste 1919–1943* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997); Franz Borkenau, *The Communist International* (London: Faber & Faber, 1938); James W. Hulse, *The Forming of the Communist International* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964); Dietrich Geyer, "Kommunistische Internationale", in C.D. Kernig (ed.), *Die Kommunistischen Parteien der Welt. Sowjetsystem und Demokratische Gesellschaft* (Freiburg: Herder, 1969), pp. 14 ff.; Branco Lazitch, Milorad M. Drachkovitch, *Lenin and the Comintern* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972); Edward Hallet Carr, *The Twilight of the Comintern 1930–1935* (London: Macmillan, 1982); Alexander Watlin, *Die Komintern 1919–1929* (Mainz: Decaton, 1993); Alexander Vatlin, *Die Komintern. Gründung, Programmatik, Akteure* (Berlin: Karl Dietz, 2009); Kevin McDermott, Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern. A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Basingstoke-London: Macmillan, 1996); Mikail Narinsky, Jürgen Rojahn (eds.), *Center and Periphery. The History of the Comintern in the Light of New Documents* (Amsterdam: Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Milano: Fondazione Feltrinelli, Brussels: Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1996); Bernhard H. Bayerlein (ed.), *Georgi Dimitroff: Tagebücher 1933–1943*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Aufbau, 2000). For comprehensive array and classification of the transnational organizations under the umbrella of the Comintern see Bernhard H. Bayerlein, "Das neue Babylon. Strukturen und Netzwerke der Kommunistischen Internationale und ihre Klassifizierung", *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (2004), pp. 181–270.

4 An essential idea encapsulating the Comintern universe originates from a pertinent observation by George Orwell, designating the multiple contradictory realities and images of the Comintern that must be recognised and analysed by historians: "The words *Communist International*, for instance, call up a composite picture of universal human brotherhood, red flags, barricades, Karl Marx and the Paris Commune. The word *Comintern*, on the other hand, suggests merely a tightly-knit organisation and a well-defined body of doctrine. It refers to something almost as easily recognised, and as limited in purpose, as a chair or a table. Comintern is a word that can be uttered almost without taking thought, whereas *Communist International* is a phrase over which one is obliged to linger at least momentarily". George Orwell (Eric Arthur Blair), *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Appendix. The Origins of Newspeak (London, Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 320–321.

The Comintern as a transnational institution comprised 60–80 legal and illegal national Communist parties with up to 1 200 000 members (without the Russian party), each of them maintaining other multifunctional (political, unionist, cultural, socio-political) networks. As a transnational vertical and horizontal network, the multicultural Comintern was not a state organisation, but also never entirely free of Soviet influence. Its leading figures like Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin, Molotov, Manuilsky and Dimitrov were mostly Russians, and the Comintern's Executive Committee (ECCI) was directly linked with the Politburo of the All-Russian Communist Party (CPSU). With Stalinism, Soviet patterns of government, like personal networks and patronage, were imposed.

Besides being the international governing body and auxiliary apparatus of the Communist movement, the Comintern also acted as a global institution of cultural transfer. During its early years, it developed the institutional and cognitive scripts of internationalism for the new age of "wars and revolutions". Its initial attractive power, nourished by progressive practices, impressive networks and an innovative use of the available media, attracted not only workers but also a high percentage of intellectuals on a global level. From the mid-1920s onwards, Stalinism implemented a more bureaucratic regime, using violent totalitarian practices for a different kind of transfer, mystifying language and notions, ritualising and ideologising symbols and aims (e.g. *"international solidarity"*, *"anti-Fascism"*, *"the threat of war"*, *"anti-imperialism"*, *"the fight for freedom"* etc.). Communication became formalised and everything was subjected to a strict censorship.

When the Comintern abandoned its position as an independent global actor, adopting the concept of "socialism in one country", the support of the "fatherland of the working people" and the need to industrially modernise the Soviet Union were no longer connected to the goal of an international revolution, although this continued to be part of its main narrative. Thus, the Comintern was progressively transformed into a self-legitimising mouthpiece of the Great Russian State, which should only serve to influence national governments in the world. The artificially decreed war threat syndrome, without being justified by any immediate danger from outside, was transferred in order to warn party members and at the same time to legitimise the emerging Stalinist empire. Nevertheless, even the sterile party-Communism remained, in the eyes of many, attractive. Sustained by the Communist parties' anti-Fascist propaganda and by their anti-Fascist attitude, which was supported by many liberal intellectuals, the Comintern was still positively perceived in a large part of the world's public opinion. Its main drop in popularity occurred only during the second half of the 1930s, due to the ongoing terror in the Soviet Union and

the fact that people started to realise that the Comintern was using global practices to manipulate public opinion.

This volume is the first systematical approach to the Comintern's "Intermediate Empire", the anticipated Cultural International and its deconstruction. Except for the International Red Aid (MOPR, see Chapter 2), the end of "Cultintern", the anticipated "Cultural International" ultimately affected all the international organisations described in this anthology, including the International Workers' Relief or Internationale Arbeiterhilfe (IAH, see Chapter 3) and the League Against Imperialism (LAI, see Chapter 5). Its end was sealed with a new emphasis on the national principle later advocated in the Soviet Union, and more particularly and brutally by the "great purges" in 1936–1938. Only "Soviet Cultural Diplomacy" survived this paradigm shift, as the examples of the *Rassemblement Universel pour la Paix* (RUP) and certain friendship organisations show.

The international organisations included in this anthology distinguish themselves through a "set of common activities, rituals and cultural practices" within the concept of internationalism, which are stronger than ideological points.⁵ That means that in the political space, they developed a self-identifying proper language with corresponding slogans, symbols and matrixes for everyday life (folklore, songs), organising the exchange of delegations and contacts.

Whereas the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (ISH, see Chapter 6) and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW, see Chapter 7) were components of the Red International of Labour Unions, and therefore more closely linked to the Comintern, the status of the two other organisations featured in this anthology belonged to the so-called "sympathising organisations for special purposes" which possessed a perceptible and more independent status in relation to the Comintern. Their origins were multiple. They could have been created at the initiative of the CPSU or the Comintern, in some cases they were the result of individual efforts, in other cases they originated from non-Communist fractions and activists of the international workers' movement.

The Epochal Figure of Willi Münzenberg

With the exception of the International Red Aid and the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers, Willi Münzenberg – supported by his assistants

5 Stickler, *Nichtregierungsorganisationen*, p. 15.

and helpers – was the inspirer, creator and organiser of most of the solidarity organisations presented in this anthology. There is no room in this article to track his most important achievements from the Socialist Youth International (the most important mass movement against WWI) to the League Against Imperialism and for National Self Determination as the international hegemonic power organisation sometimes surpassing parallel initiatives of the League of Nations.⁶ But without any doubt, and in relation to both social and political movements, he was a central figure in the 20th century. His re-appraisal in the historiography is finally under way, and the former legends and myths contained in earlier research can now finally be laid to rest.

With regard to manpower, biographical and prosopographical research proves the central role played by great organisers, intermediaries and mediators, pacifist writers, bureaucrats, agents and ordinary workers. For the IAH these were Münzenberg's assistants like Hans Schulz and Louis Gibarti; for the LAI these included activists like Julio Antonio Mella and Diego Rivera from Cuba and Mexico, Mohammed Hatta from Indonesia, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya from India or Tiémoko Garan Kouyaté from Africa. Bukharin, Kuusinen, Manuisky, Roy, Petrovskii or Šmeral belonged to the political employees and leading Comintern staff, whereas Clara Zetkin was crucial for the International Red Aid. Münzenberg brought huge respect towards the German socialist and friend of Rosa Luxemburg, who also directed the International Women's Secretariat of the Comintern, another star in the "solar system" until its bureaucratization, and also towards the Zurich Anarchist, physicians and psychologist Fritz Brupbacher who was a father figure to him. There can be no doubt about Münzenberg's pivotal role in the IAH, LAI, ITUCNW as well as in a number of other initiatives, and this rectifies several misconceptions in the recent historiography.⁷ It is therefore not without reason that other organisations like the MOPR or the ISH on closer inspection reveal a more closed, even a sectarian, character.

6 For the most comprehensive view on the scholarly literature see: Bernhard H. Bayerlein, Kasper Braskén, Uwe Sonnenberg, Gleb J. Albert, "Research on Willi Münzenberg (1889–1940). Life, Activities and Solidarity Networks. A bibliography", *The International Newsletter of Communist Studies* 25 (2012), pp. 104–122; also in: <http://www.munzenbergforum.de/>.

7 See Kasper Braskén's and Fredrik Petersson's chapters in this anthology. For some methodological reflections and case studies see: Bernhard H. Bayerlein, Jean-François Fayet, Anne Hartmann, André Gounot, Fredrik Petersson, "Kultintern. Kultintern. Культинтерн. Beiträge zur Allunions-Gesellschaft für kulturelle Zusammenarbeit (VOKS), zum Internationalen Frauensekretariat der Komintern, zur Liga gegen den Imperialismus und zur Roten Sportinternationale", *The International Newsletter of Communist Studies Online* 20 (2007), pp. 89–110.

It is interesting to see that, in the scholarly literature, Münzenberg has no home base anywhere. German historiography seems unwilling to receive him again in his native country. Therefore, it is understandable that before his "renationalisation", he will be rediscovered by transnational and global research. The current state of research also reflects deficiencies in the study of solidarity organisations. The man from Erfurt was banned by the KPD (Communist Party of Germany), and later in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) because of his break with Stalinism and the Communist Party in the late 1930s. Treated as a "renegade" he was declared to be a non-person, but remained a silent challenge not only for Communist history but also for global history on social and cultural movements. In both cases, the "tunnel vision" of the Cold War (Stefan Berger) is responsible for the fact that the traditions and historical actors of a non-dogmatic and radical humanitarian-socialist Marxism were forced out of the mainstream understanding of Communism. In the West, in addition to the ascendancy of Social Democracy over Communism, Münzenberg and his organisations have been forgotten in the Social Democratic historiography, despite the participation of numerous, especially German and French, Social Democrats in the German "Popular front" and in Münzenberg's final project, the journal *Die Zukunft* (1938–1940). As a result of the division of the continent after 1945 and the "nightmare world of the Cold War", dissident Communist and alternative Socialist and Democratic European perspectives no longer "fit into" the main narrative.

Over the years, especially during the first half of the 1930s, the Secretary-General of the IAH, Münzenberg, believed in acting (and in a broad sense did act) in accordance with Stalinism. In the second half of the 1930s, however, he was labelled a "renegade" and would become the new main enemy of official Communism. In the words of Wilhelm Pieck, he was more dangerous than Trotsky whereas Stalin demanded that he should be lured to Moscow in order to arrest him.⁸ Münzenberg's albeit gradual defection from Stalinism after 1935/1936 came as a surprise to many. Especially his final life project in exile as editor of the weekly journal *Die Zukunft* (1938–1940) represents an unconditional anti-Fascist and, since the signing of the Stalin-Hitler Non-Aggression and Friendship Pacts in 1939, also a steadfast anti-Stalinist commitment which probably cost him his life.

8 "Münzenberg ist ein Trotzist. Wenn er herkommt, werden wir ihn sofort verhaften. Geben Sie sich Mühe, ihn hierher zu locken." (Bayerlein [ed.], *Georgi Dimitroff. Tagebücher*, p.165). See also: Kasper Braskén, "'Hauptgefahr jetzt nicht Trotzismus, sondern Münzenberg'. East German Uses of Remembrance and the Contentious Case of Willi Münzenberg", CoWoPa. Comintern Working Paper 22 (2011). www.abo.fi/student/media/7957Cowopa22brasken.pdf.

That Münzenberg's pivotal role in the 20th century is becoming better known and more widely accepted is shown by the reception in the historiography of his propaganda concept in recent studies in intellectual and global history. Also in cultural studies, the life work of this publicist, publisher, propagandist and film producer, who was also one of the founders of anti-colonialism and the prototype of the modern human rights activist, has again been highlighted more recently. Nevertheless he is still described very differently, as the "Red millionaire" and inventor of modern media models, as a visionary architect of the post-colonial world as well as the Moscow secret seducer of Western intellectuals, as most consistent defender of the Popular Front or as an unscrupulous businessman, as a press magnate or a charlatan leading a double life, a builder of Potemkin villages, but also an "Artist in the matters of Revolution".⁹ Thus, for example Trotsky did not believe that Münzenberg was really able to either declare himself independent or having the courage to oppose Stalin.

Anticipation and Deconstruction of the Cultural International and Transfer of Charisma

Within the Comintern's "solar system", the IAH came undoubtedly closest to embodying the concept of the Cultural International. In this respect the view to the IAH's roots is helpful and illustrative to explain this phenomenon. Undoubtedly, there is a polygenesis. In addition to the attraction of the Comintern itself, the following sources and impulses might be determined at a transnational level:

- A constant motivation for the unconditional support and solidarity with isolated Russia, impoverished by the civil war on the background of the fundamental sympathy with the Russian Revolution. Lenin gave instructions to

9 Apart from the German biography written by his wife, one English language and one French Münzenberg biography have been published. See: Babette Gross, *Willi Münzenberg. Eine politische Biographie. Mit einem Vorwort von Arthur Koestler* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1967); Sean McMeekin, *The Red Millionaire. A political biography of Willi Münzenberg. Moscow's secret propaganda tsar in the West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Alain Dugrand, Frédéric Laurent, *Willi Münzenberg. Artiste en révolution. 1889–1940* (Paris: Fayard, 2008). See the review by Ursula Langkau-Alex in: *Francia-Recensio*, 2010–3, 19./20. Jahrhundert – Histoire contemporaine, http://www.perspectivia.net:8403/perspectivia/content/publikationen/francia/francia-recensio/2010-3/ZG/dugrand-aurent_langkau-alex.

organise the international campaign against the Russian famine what later led to the establishing of the IAH.

- Among the different sources of the IAH was a special (mostly German) type of "Kultursozialismus" (Cultural Socialism) originating from the Young Socialist's radicalized Left Opposition in the Weimar Republic and partially also from the communitarian and anarchist movement. With the aim of establishing social hegemony Cultural Socialism included a life-world orientated function integrating all aspects of life. Especially in Münzenberg's home country Thuringia, the kind of movements which aimed at social hegemony, like the Freethinkers, the Worker's Education or the Leaving the Church Movement were particularly strong.
- The avant-garde movements of modernity in literature, art and architecture played a central role as a substrate and charisma. It has to be stressed here, that at a transnational level, the vanguard of writers and artists in the interwar period was largely orientated to the communist and not the social democratic parties. The Cultural International immediately integrated and exploited the new aesthetics and media. Humble beginnings as the "Künstlerhilfe" (support of artists) were nonetheless very effective.
- Another significant point of departure for the Cultural International was the wide definition of Soviet culture and cultural policy effective in the early Bolshevik period of the Soviet Union. Including large areas of social and education politics, this was also largely adopted by the Comintern. Often enriched with spatial (regional and national) specifics, the Cultural International represented not least the transnational projection of Soviet avant-garde revolutionary culture in the sense of the creation of a new world culture as signals of the expected socialist future. These achievements were added to IAH's own practice, as well as the new contemporary methods of political propaganda and political marketing. Later, under Stalinism, this claim for avant-garde culture was transformed into "Kultura 2" as Paperny called new Soviet dominant culture since the 1930s.
- Moreover, another of the roots was certainly the impetus for a radical, internationalist, interactive and efficient Humanitarianism. Under the omen of International Solidarity any form of political and social oppression and the "white terror" considered as normal under capitalist conditions should be antagonized. In fact, except among a few left socialist, anarchist and Christian circles, no one practiced this in an unconditional form.

The essence of the Cultural International might be broken down on the Zurich workers' doctor Fritz Brupbacher. He was not only a father figure for Willi Münzenberg but also an inspiration for the construction of the "solar system".

Brupbacher's biography embodies the a holistic political and cultural concept and "mode de vie", whether as a social ethicist, educator, organizer of the temperance movement and the leaving-the-church activities, admirer of Kropotkin, socialist, anti-militarist, anarchist and communist, trade unionist, physician, psychologist, sex educator, editor and author, co-founder of the famine relief for Russia who was expelled from the KPD in 1933, not least for defending Trotsky.

The Cultural International was the institutionalisation of Walter Benjamin's "dream house of modernity". However, it declined even before it ever had been constructed. Despite its inherent tendency directed against apparatus logics and politics, the Cultural International took over the Comintern and VKP (b), the All-Russian Communist Party (bolsheviks), induced "social-fascism policy" at the end of the 1920s. This implied a splitting of numerous yet pluralistic non-party organisations and associations worldwide, from Free-thinkers to Theatre Associations, from all kinds of worker's unions to the Federation of Victims of War. As a consequence, and after some initial successes, the Cultural International failed finally and definitely – like the Second and Third Internationals themselves – to create a broad popular movement as axis of worldwide resistance against Fascism, Nazism and corporatist dictatorships. By dissolution or increasing transmutation to Stalinism, the "dream house of modernity" tumbled like "Potemkin villages".

Even in its anticipated form, this Cultural International – "Cultintern" – created historical moments which turned into myths and symbols of the 20th Century. At the beginning of the 1920s, the international campaign against the famine in Soviet Russia contributed to breaking the isolation and the blockade of the young Soviet Union. The campaign against the Sacco and Vanzetti trial, which was initiated by Willi Münzenberg in 1925, turned into the largest demonstration against US politics during the inter-war Period. The Brussels Congress at the Palais Egmont in 1927 was the birthplace of the League Against Imperialism. This organisation became the largest international anti-colonial movement of the inter-war period, listing political activists like Nehru and Sandino among its members and was a forerunner of the Bandung Conference of 1955. The liberation campaign of the accused in the Reichstags-Fire Trial in 1933, the Counter Trial in London and Paris and other initiatives were a catalyst for worldwide anti-Fascist opinions and movements following the German catastrophe of 1933, by creating a social and political space in countries like France or Spain in which a revolutionary victory over Fascism was still possible.

The regional and spatial dimensions signal the transnational and international extension of these networks. Hamburg, for example, was the

organisational centre of the workers and radicals in the African Atlantic, while Berlin was the European capital of the colonial émigrés – not Paris or London. The African Atlantic formed an innovative radical network which radiated out as far as Latin America, the seamen's clubs of the ISH were not only present in Hamburg or Duisburg, but also in Marseille, Bordeaux, Copenhagen, New York and Salvador da Bahia. On the occasion of the 10th Anniversary Congress of the International Workers' Relief in Berlin (1931) "all races and colours" of "the whole world" were assembled, among them delegates from the Soviet Union, Germany, France, Ireland, India, England, the United States, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Norway, Uruguay, Egypt, Australia, Indonesia, Spain, China and the Netherlands.¹⁰ Among the most important actors involved one could find – apart from Willi Münzenberg himself – Clara Zetkin, Henri Barbusse, Tom Mann, Reginald Bridgeman and George Padmore, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya and Manabendra Nath Roy from India, Bekar Ferdi from Turkey, the Africans Garan Kouyaté and Jomo Kenyatta, or the Indonesian Abdul Medjid.

The multitude of topics encompassed by this "solar system of the Comintern", as Comintern Secretary Otto Kuusinen called it, comprised auxiliary initiatives supporting social movements against the consequences of wars, civil wars, and natural disasters, anti-imperialist and anti-colonial movements as an alternative to Pan-Africanism and Islamism, a sometimes avantgardistic culture of propaganda and media (press, film and art), the promotion and support of the Soviet Union by all means as well as through specific youth, peasant and women's organisations as a vehicle for articulating their strata-specific interests. In such a way, these movements as a whole greatly influenced and stipulated a post-political and societal radicalisation of race, culture and politics. Whereas general conditions in the 1920s seemed to be paving the way for this new solidarity system in the sense of a Cultural International, the inner political constraints and consequences of Comintern politics as an increasingly integral part of Stalinism led to the narrowing of institutional action, deterioration and, ultimately, to liquidation. Especially within the period between 1929 and 1937, the fledgling "Cultintern" was to become a tightly-knit and strongly-controlled body. Previous to this, the "Cultintern" it had a more pluralist social and political composition, with a huge number of non-party members, liberal intellectuals, Social Democrats, anarchists etc. Starting with the German catastrophe in 1933 and the liquidation of Berlin as the main capital of solidarity movements in the Western world, the Comintern Solar System gradually disintegrated and was mostly dissolved, particularly during the period between 1935 and 1938. Other organisations still survived, e.g. the International Red Aid, but

10 See Kasper Braskén's chapter on the IAH in this anthology.

these were now strongly controlled under a regime of various Soviet bodies, serving highly selective and instrumental solidarity objectives.

New Empirical Foundations – The Importance of the “Archival Revolution”

Until the opening of the archives from 1990 onwards, it was not easy to accurately re-construct the activities and achievements of the Communist International, or analyse the role of its peripheral organisations. The solar system of the Comintern and the “Cultintern” were soon to be discovered as a new research field.¹¹ The main gap, the lack of documents reflecting central decision-making, is now on the way to being filled in. Without this “archival revolution” having taken place over the past 25 years, this anthology would not have been possible. The identification, retrieval, processing and subsequent interpretation and appraisal of a veritable deluge of new archival documents not only in Moscow, but also in Berlin, London and Stockholm is on the way and this anthology provides important new insights into them. Since then, and for the first time, this development has made fundamental and comparative research possible, revealing both the decision-making processes and the process of parallelisation and synchronisation between the Comintern, the All-Russian Communist Party and the national Communist parties, which finally allows a more detailed analysis of the international sympathising organisations as one element within this threefold sphere of power to be undertaken. This methodical prerogative means that a balance sheet can only be produced through such a comparative and transnational analysis. Only in this way is it possible to explain the political shifts that occurred within this “Intermediate Empire”. As a consequence, the following five articles are based on a huge substrata of new sources which also permit a typological classification.

In this volume, Kasper Braskén illustrates a process of “internal negotiations” on the basis of the extremely rich archival heritage of the IAH, mainly in Moscow and Berlin. Gleb Albert, for the first time, uses the local Soviet press and mainly the MOPR collection in Russia’s central archives, among them not only documents originating from the highest echelons of the governing bodies but also letters from ordinary Soviet citizens and grass-roots activists.

11 See Fredrik Petersson’s chapter in this anthology. For several methodological reflections see Bayerlein, Fayet, Hartmann, “Kultintern – Cultintern”, pp. 89–91.

Fredrik Petersson revisits the history of the League Against Imperialism by way of mostly new documents from Moscow, Berlin, Amsterdam and London archives. Holger Weiss charts the course of the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers and the "Radical African Atlantic" through the ITUCNW, not only via the Comintern Archives at the RGASPI, Moscow, but also via the Archives of the British and American Police and Military intelligence services held at the British National Archives, as well as via FBI files, Northern Germany Regional Archives and the Swedish and Danish National Archives.

The International Solidarity Organisations and Global Studies

The case studies presented here employ a variety of methodical approaches in order to throw new light on both the organisational history and the central actors of the Cultural International, focussing particularly on their spatial, conceptual and cultural aspects. This will help to fill in an important gap in historiography, political science and the social sciences as a whole, by supplying a comparative survey of the patterns of agency for the entire interwar period.

The international solidarity organisations in the Comintern's periphery mainly the Non- or Beyond-Party Mass Organisations and the Sympathising Organisations for Special Purposes have not yet been fully scrutinised in the fields of global history and the history of international organisations,¹² and have only been barely touched upon in the history of internationalism and international solidarity. This dimension is also largely lacking from both social movements research and comparative Communist history.¹³ One of the reasons for this is that the history of Communism (as an international movement) on a large scale has not yet been integrated into global history itself.¹⁴ Previous

12 Some aspects like the film productions are addressed in the recent assessment of global history: Akira Iriye, Jürgen Osterhammel, Emily S. Rosenberg, *Geschichte der Weltmärkte und Weltkriege 1870–1945* (München: C.H. Beck in Gemeinschaft mit Harvard University Press, 2012).

13 The most recent example is: Silvio Pons, Robert Service (eds.), *A Dictionary of 20th-Century Communism* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010). None of these organisations have been included, not even in the chapter dedicated to the Comintern. As a positive example to be mentioned: Stephen A. Smith (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

14 See my articles: Bernhard H. Bayerlein, "Communism as an International Movement", in Helmut Anheier, Mark Juergensmeyer, Victor Faessel (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Global Studies*, 5 vols. (Thousand Oaks, CA/London: SAGE, 2012), vol. 1, pp. 234–241; id.: "The Communist International", *ibid.*, pp. 242–243.

research was primarily conducted with a focus on national or bilateral aspects, episodes or parts of these networks. Furthermore, a certain number of empirically valuable works were written through the ideological lens of the Institutes for Marxism-Leninism. Even in spite of the “cultural turn” in social sciences and history, the interest in these beyond party organisations’ was not reinforced.¹⁵ With the exception of the Red International of Labour Unions and the League Against Imperialism, no major fundamental monographs based on the new available documents have hitherto been published.¹⁶ On the other hand, from the perspective of Soviet cultural politics, cultural transfers and cultural diplomacy, the works of Sheila Fitzpatrick and Michael David-Fox are fundamental and complementary.¹⁷ Innovative research, based on these new documents, into Münzenberg, being undoubtedly the main protagonist of this type of agency, began only after the new millennium.¹⁸

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- 15 For the first comprehensive typological and network assessment after the opening of the archives see: Bernhard H. Bayerlein, “Das neue Babylon. Strukturen und Netzwerke der Kommunistischen Internationale und ihre Klassifizierung”, *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (2004), pp. 181–270.
 - 16 See: Reiner Tosstorff, *Profintern. Die Rote Gewerkschaftsinternationale 1920–1937* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004); Mustafah Haikal, “Die Kommunistische Internationale und die Liga gegen Imperialismus und für nationale Unabhängigkeit”, in Theodor Bergmann, Mario Kessler (eds.), *Aufstieg und Zerfall der Komintern. Studien zur Geschichte ihrer Transformation (1919–1943)* (Mainz: Podium Progressiv, 1992), pp. 239–252; Daniel Kerssfeld, “La Liga Antiimperialista de las Américas. Una consturcción política entre el marxismo y el Latinoamericanismo”, in Elvira Concheiro, Massimo Modonesi, Horacio Crespo, *El Comunismo. Otras Miradas desde América Latina* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2007); Daniel Kerssfeld, *Contra el imperio. Historia de la Liga Antimperialista de las Américas* (México: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2012); Holger Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic: African American Agency, West African Intellectuals and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Fredrik Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg. For the MOPR: Sabine Hering, Kurt Schilde* (eds.), *Die Rote Hilfe. Die Geschichte der internationalen kommunistischen “Wohlfahrtsorganisation” und ihrer sozialen Aktivitäten in Deutschland (1921–1941). Mit einem Vorwort von Rudolph Bauer* (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 2003).
 - 17 Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment. Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front. Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).
 - 18 See also the publication prepared by Simone Roche based on the Willi Münzenberg Meeting 1992 in Aix-en-Provence, Simone Roche (ed.), *Willi Münzenberg. Un homme contre* (Aix-en-Provence: Bibliothèque Méjanes, Temps des cerises, 1993); cf. Til Schulz (ed.), *Willi Münzenberg: Propaganda als Waffe. Ausgewählte Schriften 1919–1940* (Frankfurt am Main: März bei Zweitausendeins, 1972).

In his view of the international organisations during the inter-war period, Akira Iriye rightly points out the fact that this was not just a matter of simple cross-border relations. Stressing the explosive increase in the number of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) during this period, he also mentions the important part played in this by the Communist and Socialist movements.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the movements and organisations under scrutiny here were mostly not included in the theories of international organisations and networks, and central questions concerning contextualisation were left unanswered. For example, any typological analysis differentiating between the solidarity organisations and the cultural diplomacy networks was lacking.²⁰ The intriguing question as to how these organisations developed into transnational networks spreading such new ideas all over the world has not yet been answered conclusively.

The lack of adequate research into these peripheral organisations is evident both in global history and the different sociological and political science concepts of world system and world society, as well as in social history and research into social movements, even though the history of international solidarity has recently been regaining some of its significance,²¹ including in the new Global Labour History.²² One of the reasons for this paradoxical situation is probably the difficulty in obtaining an unbiased and differentiated view of the history of Communism itself as a transnational movement. In contrast to the "totalitarian" viewpoint as well as to apologetic standpoints, this anthology presents a differentiated approach, looking at the transformation processes of these organisations and currents, their impressive rise bearing "unparalleled prospects to develop new global networks and identifications"²³ in the 1920s, but also their nearly complete disappearance in the 1930s. These different

19 Akira Iriye, *Global Community. The role of International Organizations in the making of the contemporary world* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

20 See: Jean-François Fayet, *VOKS. Le laboratoire helvétique. Histoire de la diplomatie culturelle soviétique durant l'entre-deux-guerres* (Chêne-Bourg: Georg éditeur, 2014).

21 David Featherstone, *Solidarity: Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism* (London: Zed, 2012).

22 Frits van Holthoon, Marcel van der Linden (eds.), *Internationalism in the Labour Movement 1830–1940*, 2 vols. (Leiden/New York: Brill, 1988); Berthold Unfried, Jürgen Mittag, Marcel van der Linden, Eva Himmelstoss, *Transnational Networks in the 20th Century. Ideas and Practices, Individuals and Organisations. Transnationale Netzwerke im 20. Jahrhundert. Historische Erkundungen zu Ideen und Praktiken, Individuen und Organisationen* (Leipzig: Akademische Verlaganstalt 2008).

23 See Kasper Braskén's chapter on the IAH in this anthology.

stages encompass a transformational process from relative autonomy to a strict compliance with their bureaucratic instructions from Moscow. This leads us to discovering lost pieces of global history, disentangling the wide-ranging transnational network experiences and to exploring the various turning points within the “Comintern solar system”.

The relatively short lifetime of most of these organisations can be explained not only by their interdependence with the Comintern and its stages of development, but also not least by the intermediate, hybrid character of formal organisations and other substructures (editorial houses, schools, committees etc.) as such. In order to justify their existence, they were continuously being forced to prove their legitimacy and they did this “by means of the reference to their engagement for general interests”.²⁴ During the period of Stalinism, this became increasingly difficult. The simultaneous process of de-internationalisation described below led, in most of the cases, to their dissolution.

Self-identifying concepts, communication and networks were the conditions needed to forge a globalism. People, goods and ideas/symbols (the three main ingredients in Wallerstein’s concept of a world system) joined together in the centres and the (semi-) peripheries, shaping social mass movements which were the origin of a number of “global moments”, which are remembered in the following articles.²⁵ The inaugural congress of the League Against Imperialism and for National Self Determination at the Brussel’s Palais Egmont, the World Congress of the Worker’s International Relief (WIR) – the English name of the IAH, in Berlin 1931, the demonstrations for Sacco und Vanzetti in the USA and abroad or the campaign against Reichstag Fire trial conveyed a great deal of charisma.²⁶ Most of the networks of the first period in the 1920s resulted from a combination of initiatives ranging from the transnational to the regional and local and from the local and regional to the global, whether they were dealing with the anticolonial Sandinist movements in the Carribean or the organisation of mobile soup kitchens by the IAH in the suburbs of Berlin.

A Re-start and a Re-appraisal: The InterSol Working Group and the International Willi Münzenberg Forum

Since the beginning of the new millennium, the different networks of the interwar period have been the subject of a series of working papers and

24 Stickler, *Nichtregierungsorganisationen*, p. 33.

25 Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, 4 vols. (New York/San Francisco/London: Academic Press, 1974–2011).

26 Sebastian Conrad, Dominic Sachsenmaier (eds.), *Competing Visions of World Order. Global Moments and Movements, 1880s–1930s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

articles by the authors of this anthology. One of its origins was the creation of the research group on "International Solidarity, Utopian Ideals and Political Consciousness: Radical and Left-wing Networks during the Inter-war Period and Beyond" (Intersol) at Åbo Akademi University, Finland. This group has presented a number of working papers. One of its special research areas, "The Comintern and African Nationalism", has been continuously expanded upon by Holger Weiss, the *spiritus rector* of this working group. His new book presents an extensive review and critical analysis of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers and the attempts by the Comintern to establish an anti-colonial political platform in both the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa during the inter-war period.²⁷ An extensive monograph on the League Against Imperialism has been recently published by Fredrik Petersson,²⁸ while Kasper Braskén's PhD dissertation on the International Workers' Relief has also been recently published, both under the supervision of Holger Weiss.²⁹ At the same time, research into Willi Münzenberg has taken a leap forwards. The results were presented for the first time in a synthetic way at the 2012 European Social Science History Conference in Glasgow, Scotland, placing the "Comintern's solar system" within a more global perspective. In October 2012, the first European Willi Münzenberg Conference was organised in Berlin.³⁰ Several of the papers from this conference have since been published,³¹ and

27 Weiss, *Framing A Radical African Atlantic*.

28 Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg*.

29 Kasper Braskén, *The Revival of International Solidarity. The Internationale Arbeiterhilfe, Willi Münzenberg and the Comintern in Weimar Germany, 1921–1933*, PhD Thesis, Åbo Akademi University, 2014, revised as id., *The International Workers' Relief, Communism, and Transnational Solidarity. Willi Münzenberg in Weimar Germany* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

30 See the conference report: Ralf Hofrogge, "Internationalismus, transnationale Solidaritätsnetzwerke, Antifaschismus und Antistalinismus in den 1920er- und 1930er-Jahren – Europäische Willi-Münzenberg-Arbeitstagung", <http://www.hsozkult.de/conference-report/id/tagungsberichte-4469>; cf.: <http://www.munzenbergforum.de/veranstaltung/europaeische-willi-muenzenberg-arbeitstagung>.

31 Wolfgang Hesse, "Die Ausnahmen und die Regel. Lebenswelt, Medienbewusstsein und Pressepolitik in der Arbeiterfotografie der Weimarer Republik", *Jahrbuch für Forschungen zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 12:3 (2013), pp. 64–90; Dieter Schiller, "Willi Münzenberg und die Intellektuellen. Die Jahre in der Weimarer Republik 1921 bis 1933", *Jahrbuch für Forschungen zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 12:3 (2013), pp. 43–63. Here also a review by Mario Kessler of the Katz biography by Jonathan Miles (Jonathan Miles, *The Nine Lives of Otto Katz Nine Lives of Otto Katz. The Remarkable Story of a Communist Super-Spy*

a research bibliography has also been made available.³² At the beginning of this year, 2015, the Internet platform of the International Willi Münzenberg Forum was launched,³³ which contains an extensive chronology of his life and work. This site will also publish the contributions of the First International Willi Münzenberg Congress in Berlin in 2015 and, in the future, this portal will be the repository for the archives of the various international solidarity movements.

Research Results: Five Contributions in a Comparative Analysis

The following case studies employ a variety of methodical approaches and answers in order to shed new light on the organisational history, the central actors, spaces, conceptions and the cultural focus of the “Cultural International”.

In his account of the Internationale Arbeiterhilfe (IAH), Kasper Braskén does not utilise the traditional method of examining sociological or ideological features. He considers the “contextual articulation”, representation and mobilisation processes of the IAH from a standpoint of agency, stressing the role of language and the formation of “symbols of international solidarity”. The IAH is viewed mainly through the prism of the international worker’s activism and their concrete forms of support and action in the specific cases of strikes, natural disasters etc. and less through symbolic solidarity. Starting with WWI and the Weimar Republic as the backdrop, he also delineates the power relations between the IAH leadership, the Comintern and the national committees in both Moscow and Berlin. Stressing the importance of practical campaigns, i.e. mainly the IAH’s central international solidarity campaigns, Braskén provides evidence to establish not only the IAH’s ability to spread the idea of international solidarity, but also its ability to organise this solidarity practically and to produce a “global imaginary based upon it”. In doing so, the author focuses more on the proletarian solidarity amongst workers, and less on the role of intellectuals and liberal aspects of public opinion worldwide, which played an important part in the propagandist concept of IAH.

Gleb Albert narrates the story of the Soviet section of the International Red Aid (IRA/MOPR) as a central core of this organisation’s activity. He sheds light on the role of MOPR within Soviet power structures, and provides evidence

[London: Bantam Press, 2011]). Prior to his downfall resulting from his activity as a Soviet spy, Otto Katz was one of Münzenberg’s closest collaborators.

32 Bayerlein/Braskén/Sonnenberg/Albert, *Research on Willi Münzenberg*.

33 For this Forum’s website see: <http://www.munzenbergforum.de>. The more than 40 contributions will be published in 2016 by Uwe Sonnenberg, Kasper Braskén and Bernhard H. Bayerlein.

that a lively practice of internationalism was simultaneously promoted and choked within the framework of the bureaucratic "mass organisations", until it was ultimately and definitively suffocated by the Stalinist dictatorship of mobilisation. Among other sources, he makes reference to different internationalist life environments including those of ordinary citizens through their letters to the MOPR bodies. By means of the concept of "obshchestvennost" (public sphere), the author delivers a key concept for the solidarity organisations as a whole. This term had already been used by the Bolsheviks in order to designate (potentially critical) social activism in pre-revolutionary Russia, surpassing the ranks of the party. So the term "Soviet obshchestvennost" – attributed to the "mass organisations" as a whole – already carries bureaucratic rigidity within its core.

Following the course of the League Against Imperialism and for National Independence, Fredrik Petersson provides a contextual tableau of the available literature on the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movement – the first of its kind. From its centre in Berlin and the émigré colonial community as a "connective hub", he traces the network in the peripheries, from West and South Africa to China and India, the Middle, Far and South East, from Latin America to the Balkans, and he charts the origins and the course of the 1927 International Congress against Imperialism and Colonialism in Brussels, initiated already in 1925 by Münzenberg. As a "forerunner in organising a global protest movement against colonialism and imperialism", from the Against the Cruelties in Syria Committee in 1925 to the campaign against the Meerut conspiracy trial (1933) in India, the League is presented as being at the same time the most important anti-colonial movement after the First World War and a front for Communist activity. From 1930 onwards, the author narrates a long process of agony and disintegration up until its official dissolution in 1937, revealing both personal factors and structural constraints. He re-assesses the roles and achievements of charismatic actors such as Jawarhalal Nehru from India, Julio Antonio Mella and Diego Rivera from Cuba and Mexico, Mohammed Hatta from Indonesia and Kouyaté from Africa. Referring to a latter "nostalgic reference" to the remembrance of the Brussels Congress at the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung as a "source of concerted inspiration for the liberation movements in the colonial and semi-colonial countries", the author proposes an understanding of this as "lost history". He highlights the conference's rather ambiguous background, stressing the problematic clash with the Comintern and its ever changing anti-imperialist agenda, more than the struggle for power within either the Soviet Union or the new Stalin leadership.³⁴

34 See Fredrik Petersson's chapter in this anthology.

In his first article, Holger Weiss presents a historical synthesis of the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (ISH), which existed from 1930 until 1937. Organisationally linked to the RILU, the ISH had originally been set up as a “professional international” at the trade union level. This hybrid organisation was based on cells within the individual ship crews, while the International Seamen’s Clubs (“Interclubs”) were used as bases of support on land. This article analyses the origins, structure and organisational process, national sections, Interclubs and ship cells, and includes the process of liquidation by the mid-1930s. As in the case of the Negro Committee, the author stresses the equivocal, double-sided development of both a charismatic transnational network as a solidarity organisation, representing various interests, and a secret Communist apparatus providing the worldwide distribution of communication and transport services. One of the paragraphs deals with the debate over the famous Comintern saga and bestseller *Out of the Night* by Jan Valtin (i.e. Richard Krebs)³⁵ which deals with this particular milieu and the discussion about the transformation of the ISH into a transnational apparatus of espionage during the Stalinist period.³⁶

In his second article in this anthology, Weiss focuses on the history of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, which officially had an independent status within the framework of the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), Weiss delivers a case study of this committee’s networks, showing at the same time the varying logics of interference of the different formal Comintern organisations, which of course also called into question the Committee’s autonomy. The main objective of this organisation, directed by George Padmore until the serious crisis of the 1930s, was to provide support for communications and networking as well as both to recruit radical trade union activists and to organise them within a combined strategy of class and race.

This network also included the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (ISH) with its centre in Hamburg, the International Red Aid (IRA, Berlin and Moscow), the League Against Imperialism (LAI, Berlin and London) and the Western European Bureau of the Comintern (WEB) and its Secretariat, also located in Berlin. The internal and external constraints coming “from above” were reinforced by the dispute over the Comintern’s politics of national alliances and its comparison with Pan-Africanism and Islamism. Chief amongst these were the numerous effects and consequences of Stalinism, which contributed to a growing negative “marginality” of these movements, thereby jeopardising

35 Jan Valtin, *Out of the Night* (New York: Alliance Book, 1941).

36 This is linked to actors like Otto Katz, Louis Gibarti, Albert Walter, Alfred Behm, Ernst Wollweber etc.

the entire anti-colonialist and anti-imperialism movement of the African Atlantic. Weiss raises the important question of a functional ambiguity of the Committee's agenda which he depicts as opposition between the "mouthpiece of Moscow" and the "platform for radicals".

NGOs of the Inter-war Period? How to Contextualise International Solidarity and Non-party Organisations

Internationalism, solidarity movements and international solidarity are all characteristic of classical modernity. Using different approaches, this anthology shows that solidarity need not at all be tied to the nation state.³⁷ The origins of these movements are to be found in the 18th and 19th centuries, initially with cosmopolitanism³⁸ and subsequently with (proletarian) internationalism after the differentiation of the worker's movement and the bourgeois-liberal line of policy. Different forms of internationalism arose originating from the different political and philosophical currents (including intermediate expressions). During the inter-war period of the 20th century and as a consequence of the global catastrophe of WWI, the revolutionary Soviet Union on the one hand and the League of Nations on the other, arose as new spaces of international organisations, either independent or state-bound.³⁹

It has been pointed out that the NGOs were not a 21st century invention; in fact their roots can be traced back to the 19th century. The founding of the International Worker's Association (IWA) in London in 1864 was a landmark event and one of the first comprehensive examples of transnational organisation. Ever since the beginning of 20th century and the outbreak of WWI, the First International was followed (parallel to the transnational movement of capital) by an authentic "spiral of organisations" covering a multitude of "functional associations for a representation of interests (...) cropping out of determined ideological-cultural milieus".⁴⁰ This boom continued during the

37 See: Stefan Berger, "History and National Identity. Why they should remain divorced", *History & Policy, Policy Papers*, 2007, <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/history-and-national-identity-why-they-should-remain-divorced>.

38 See further Marx' positive assessment of Cosmopolitanism: Gilbert Achkar: *Marxism, Orientalism, Cosmopolitanism* (London: Haymarket Books, 2013).

39 F.S.L. Lyons, *Internationalism in Europe 1815–1914. European Aspects* (Leiden: A.W. Sythoff, 1963).

40 Stickler, *Nichtregierungsorganisationen*, p. 59. For an important historical balance sheet see: Steve Charnovitz, "Two Centuries of Participation. NGOs and International Governance", *Michigan Journal of International Law* 18:2 (1997), pp. 183–286.

inter-war period, reflecting the necessity of international mobilisation in order both to prevent another war and to establish a general system of a representation of interests. Among the INGOS, huge new organisations were created, such as the International Chamber of Commerce, the International Co-Operative Alliance and the International Federation of Trade Unions with more than a million members. Even in the League of Nations, the NGOs were granted the right to submit proposals.⁴¹

With much debate on globalisation taking place in the 1990s, the NGOs have become a central topic in both politics and social sciences, while the more radical INGOS still do not feature in many of the reference works on global history.⁴² This phenomenon is probably also due to the fact that Communism and Socialism themselves are only rarely analysed by global historians.⁴³ This also means that the strength of these movements against the capitalist world was neither perceived nor presented as it should have been. Consequently, the crisis, defeats, and finally the failure of the traditional political representations of the worker's movement: Stalinism on the one hand and Social Democracy on the other, were objectified and only perceived in a non-critical way.

In relation to the definition of such organisations, international organisations were mostly defined as "International Governmental Organisations/IGOs", while other types of organisations which were not a result of any inter-governmental action were defined as being International Non-Governmental Organisations.⁴⁴ The term NGO is still current today but remains nevertheless quite vague. Certainly the Internationale Arbeiterhilfe (IAH), analysed in this anthology by Kasper Braskén, belongs within the realm of the INGOS, which were pioneers in the global generation of "world-policy orientated" international organisations and can be seen as "circumstantial evidence for the formation of a world society".⁴⁵ Nevertheless, as they were active under the umbrella of the Comintern and therefore at least indirectly linked to the

41 Stickler, *Nichtregierungsorganisationen*, p. 62.

42 Peter Waterman, *Globalization, Social Movements and the New Internationalisms* (London: Mansell, 1998); Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*.

43 Cf. Gleb Albert, "From 'World Soviet' to 'Fatherland of All Proletarians'. Anticipated World Society and Global Thinking in Early Soviet Russia", *InterDisciplines. Journal of History and Sociology* 1 (2012). pp. 85–119; Bayerlein: "Communism as an International Movement"; id.: "The Communist International".

44 Stickler, *Nichtregierungsorganisationen*, pp. 27f.; occasionally the demarcation of Governmental and International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOS) is fluid (*ibid.*, pp. 29, 52).

45 Stickler, *Nichtregierungsorganisationen*, p. 32.

Soviet government (which finally decided their fate) one might also say that, in fact, they represented a special group of INGOs with limited functionality. In relation to the stronger definition of today's NGOs, the "Münzenberg Organisations" differed from these mainly because they were committed to defending the interests of their own members and not primarily those of non-members. Nevertheless, the IAH was not simply a member-based non-governmental alliance of a group which had common interests and wanted to pursue common goals. With its extraordinary networks and its combination of politics, culture and media, it was also an "umbrella organisation". Based on this combination, the term "International Movement Organisations" (*Bewegungsorganisationen*) would perhaps fit better.⁴⁶ And possibly the most appropriate would be the designation "Transnational Social Movement Organisations" (TSMOs), utilised by Jackie Smith in order to design a sub-group of international NGOs, activating action "throughout ebbs and flows of movement energy" which explicitly aim at "social and political change".⁴⁷

A New Type of Transnational Networks

The new mass movements resulting both from the war and from opposition against it gave birth to a new type of transnational networks and a new type of social and political organisations. Traditionally, international solidarity organisations included philanthropic and auxiliary bodies, supporting organisations including the "friendship" societies (e.g. the Friends of the Soviet Union and others), while the new Non-Party Mass Organisations and Sympathising Organisations for Special Purposes were a special product of post-Leninist transitional phase of Soviet and Comintern politics, even overtaking and continuing in a certain sense some of the organisational traditions of the Socialist Second International and especially of the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany).

46 Kerstin Martens, "Alte und neue Players. Eine Begriffsklärung", in Christiane Frantz, Annette Zimmer (eds): *Zivilgesellschaft international. Alte und neue NGOs* (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 2002), pp. 40ff.

47 Jackie Smith, "Characteristics of the Modern Transnational Social Movement Sector", in Jackie Smith, Charles Chatfield, Ron Pagnucco (eds.), *Transnational Social Movements and Global Politics. Solidarity beyond the State* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press: 1997), pp. 42–58; Jackie Smith, Ron Pagnucco, Charles Chatfield, "Social Movements and World Politics. A Theoretical Framework", *ibid.*, pp. 59–77, here pp. 60ff.; Stickler, *Nichtregierungsorganisationen*, pp. 29, 52. Smith defines the INGOs as "intergovernmental organisations".

The innovative factor was not their global dissemination, but their high degree of interlinking, the multiple transfers and dependencies as part of a new, progressive mass culture in the 1920s. The “solar system of the Comintern” became a powerful social, cultural, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist network during the inter-war period, amassing collective energies and the huge potential liberation from capitalism. Collective dreams were now to come true in a world society, like the “dream houses of modernity” in the 19th century urban architecture described by Walter Benjamin,⁴⁸ but within just 10 years, they had already collapsed under Stalinist rule.

The Soviet notion of culture and cultural politics which *grosso modo* had also been adopted by the Comintern, was much larger than that covered by German semantics, as it included societal and educational politics. This is why in this article we choose the concept of “Cultural International” as an ideal type which may also be easily imagined.⁴⁹

Roughly three phases and historical stages of this imaginary International can be delineated. Firstly, the transnational workers’ movement, supported by important sections of the intelligentsia and the artistic avant-garde with its roots in the 19th century, secondly, the transnational and internationalist projection of the Soviet culture of revolution of the avant-garde promoted by the Comintern in the sense of a new global cultural tool with its innovative combination of politics and media, and thirdly, the implementation of Stalinism, the “Kultura 2” in the words of Vladimir Paperny which, at the same time signified the final phase and the dissolution of most of the components of the “Cultintern”.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, and despite this liquidation process, one might think that the single parts of this International *sui generis*, encompassing millions of people on a global level for whom this frequently represented the first form or gateway to political engagement and activism, were far more than the Potemkin villages disparagingly referred to by Trotsky.⁵¹

48 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, prepared on the basis of the German Volume edited by Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, MA/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 405.

49 This is also the point of view of institutions as a support for cognitive scripts and symbol systems used in historical institutionalism as a political science approach. See: Bayerlein/Fayet/Hartmann, “Kultintern”.

50 Vladimir Paperny, *Architecture in the Age of Stalin. Culture Two*. Translated by John Hall and Roann Barris (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

51 “The Amsterdam congress against war, as well as the Paris congress against fascism, organized by the Third International are classic examples of the replacement of revolutionary class struggle by the petty-bourgeois policy of ostentatious demonstrations, showy

Articulations, Practices, Areas of Activity

Committed to the goals of the international labour movement, this "Cultural International" as a palliative against the reductionism of "transcendental homelessness" deplored by Georg Lukács (*transzendente Obdachlosigkeit*)⁵² encompassed political, social and economic interests in the same way as it did education, public health, conceptions of life, art and culture – as one whole. Transcending the political parties – including the Communist parties – it operated in the post-political space and provided a new impetus for both life world practice and the future world society. This expansion and diversification also produced intersections with the movements of radical life reform (*Lebensreform*) and holistic concepts in general. In the 1920s, these activities not only expanded to encompass other political and cultural sectors like anti-Fascism, anti-repression, anti-racism and anti-colonialism but also to a large number of other specific fields, as well as to the specific interests of the different social and professional groups. The following table shows the various social, political and cultural levels of articulation in an alphabetical order, specifying them by their organisational expressions as Non-Party Mass and Sympathising Organisations within the broader framework of the Communist International. The following tentative typology does not of course embrace the complexity and vibrancy of left internationalist engagement as a whole (see Table 1.1.). Nevertheless such a systematical classificatory treatment may be a helpful tool and source of knowledge.

A Tentative Typology: The Five Main Groups of the "Cultural International"

At least until the 1930s, the Non-Party Mass Organisations and the Sympathising Organisations for Special Purposes were adjusted in a more horizontal way and not entirely centralised and dependent like the central leaderships (*Zentralleitungen*) or the Communist parties were; they acted in a slightly independent way within the national or transnational framework and the

parades, Potemkin villages. On the morrow of the blatant protests against war in general, the heterogeneous elements artificially brought together by backstage manipulation will scatter in all directions and will not lift even a little finger against the particular war." (Leon Trotsky, *War and the Fourth International* [London: Pioneer Publishers, July 1934], available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1934/06/warfi.htm>).

52 As shown by Georg Lukács in his novel theory of 1916.

TABLE 1.1 *Modes of Articulations and International Non-Governmental Organisations under the Umbrella of the Comintern*

<i>Agrarian movement, peasant organisations</i> (The “Peasant’s International”, The International Agrarian Institute)
<i>Anti-Fascist organisations, movements and initiatives</i> (committees, international networks)
<i>Anti-colonial and anti-imperialist organisations, movements and initiatives</i> (national liberation movements, committees and boards against the oppression of the “Peoples of the East”. The League Against Imperialism and For National Independence)
<i>Anti-war organisations</i> (pacifist, peace organisations and committees, disarmament initiatives, anti-war organisations directed against the consequences of war)
<i>Anti-racism organisations</i> (Negro committees etc.)
<i>Organisations for the defence of professional and economic interests</i> (trade unions, judicial associations, co-operative organisations, peasants’ organisations, students’ associations, associations for doctors, teachers, artists, researchers etc.)
<i>Pedagogical and educational associations</i> (educational workers’ associations, community centres (“Volkshäuser”), reading clubs etc., Marxist workers’ education, scientific networks, initiatives by historians etc.)
<i>Women’s movements</i> (women’s organisations, initiatives against the prohibition of abortion)
<i>Leisure and sports organisations</i> (workers’ sports organisations, Spartakiads, rambling clubs, cycling associations, garden associations)
<i>Friendship organisations with the Soviet Union, China e.g. co-operative movement and economic policy organisations</i> (The Co-Operative International and the International Committee for Co-Operatives)
<i>Trade Union Movement</i> (The Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) etc.)
<i>Humanitarianism, organisations for the defence of human rights</i> (immigrant organisations, assistance for the right of asylum, refugee auxiliary organisations)
<i>Youth movement</i> (children’s associations, “pioneers”, The Communist Youth International etc.)
<i>Life reform, ethical and philosophical associations</i> (Free-Thinkers, international Esperanto movement, associations for life reform)
<i>Literature and Artists, organisations of cultural actors, intellectuals</i> (writers’ associations, artists’ associations, workers’ theatre, musicians’ associations)

Media organisations, cultural communication (film distributors and production, workers' film associations, editors, journals, publishing houses, The Worker's Radio Movement and journalists' associations)

Military and self-defence organisations (proletarian self-defence organisations – Proletarischer Selbstschutz (Austria), Proletarischer Ordnerdienst (Italy), Proletarische Hundertschaften, Roter Frontkämpferbund, Roter Jungsturm (Germany))

Solidarity and relief organisations against political repression of revolutionaries, for the liberation of political prisoners (The International Red Aid etc.)

Social hygiene, sexual reform and health (organisations for hygienic and sexual education, Sexpol)

Social policy organisations and relief organisations (associations for social interests, against economic repression and poverty, for the support of workers on strike etc., tenants' and home crofters' associations, organisations for war victims, combatants and veterans.)

triangular parallelogram of Comintern, Soviet politics (the "cultural front")⁵³ and the Communist parties. Their task was to gather together the general interest of the "non-party masses" and "sympathisers" by directing this towards selective objectives and responding to specific interests of the different social strata and at the same time to generate propaganda for the Soviet Union. This large spectrum of networks was often represented by famous authors and intellectuals like Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Albert Einstein, Käthe Kollwitz, Henri Barbusse and Romain Rolland.

The global construction of the organisational networks conveyed the formation of a self-identifying framework, a sort of intermediate culture which was later appropriated by Stalinism in the sense of an instrumentalisation. Despite their global dispersion, the Moscow-Berlin link clearly represented the central axis of these transnational networks. The following typological approach allows us to define five institutional groups which formed the Comintern's "solar system". Concerning the organisations which figure in this anthology, the ITUCNW and the ISH may be categorised as belonging to the first group, while the IAH and the LAI may be said to belong to the second group, while the International Red Aid occupies an intermediate position between the two first groups.

1. Large international organisations: The “International Central Directions” (*Internationale Zentralleitungen*) for youth, trade-unions, women, co-operatives, peasants and sports (e.g. The Communist Youth International).
2. “Beyond- or Non-Party International Mass Organisations” (*Überparteiliche Massenorganisationen*) and Sympathising Organisations For Special Purposes (*Sympathisierende Organisationen für spezielle Zwecke*) (e.g. The International Red Aid).
3. International committees, initiatives, campaigns etc. (e.g. “Hands off Syria”).⁵⁴
4. Supplementary centres of activity and movements on the national level with international radiation (e.g. the literary-cultural Clarté movement in France).
5. Cultural Diplomacy Organisations (CDOs) and Soviet organisations acting on an international level, without intermediate attribution (e.g. Rassemblement Universel pour la Paix/RUP).

The Large International Organisations encompassed the so-called “International Central Directions” for Youth, Trade Unions, Women, Co-Operatives, Peasants and Sports. In their organisational designations, this included the Young Communist International (YCI), the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), the International Women’s Secretariat, the Co-Operative Section of the Comintern and the Red Sports International (“Sportintern”).

These large organisations were directly linked to the Executive Committee of the Communist International, initially perhaps with the exception of the Women’s Secretariat. In turn, these were further divided into a multitude of (international) substructures. The International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (ISH), described in this anthology,⁵⁵ maintained so-called Interclubs in France, Great Britain, Belgium, The Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Spain, Uruguay, Argentina, USA, Canada, Australia as well as in several ports in the Soviet Union.⁵⁶

The International Non-party Mass Organisations and the Sympathising Organisations for Special Purposes

The International Non-Party Organisations and the so-called Sympathising Organisations for Special Purposes encompassed a multitude of heterogeneous

54 Such institutional constructions can also be found ad hoc at a special occasion or specific event.

55 The ISH was not an official member organisation of the RILU.

56 Also in most of the Soviet harbours.

organisations which in some cases were only indirectly linked to the governing bodies of the Communist International. Among these, we find the International Red Aid/International Auxiliary Organisation for the Fighters of the Revolution (IRA/MOPR), The Worker's International Relief (WIR) and the International Relief Against Hunger in Soviet Russia, The International Archive for Social Politics, The Peasants' International, The International Council of Peasants, The International Agrarian Institute, The International Theatre Union, The International Bureau for Music, The International Film Bureau, The International Union of Revolutionary Writers and the International Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture, The International Movement of Worker Correspondents, The International of War Veterans and War Victims, The League Against Imperialism and For National Independence, the Liga Antiimperialista Panamericana and the League Against Colonial Oppression, The Friends of the Soviet Union, The Societies and the Workers' Clubs of the Friends of the New Russia and The International Association of Friends of the Soviet Union, The Workers' Delegations to the Soviet Union, The International of Proletarian Free-Thinkers, The International Union of Tenants, The International Association of Radio Workers, The Association of Workers Photographs and The International Association of Proletarian Esperantists.⁵⁷

Undoubtedly, the most noteworthy and perhaps the most interesting type of non-party organisation – the one with the most innovative character, described in Kasper Braskén's chapter, is the IAH (in Britain the WIR). As an innovative type of International Non-Governmental Organisations, the Arbeiterhilfe represents a unique "relationship between media activity and politics" (Hélène Roussel). Realising an interdisciplinary and intercultural transfer, the IAH was oriented towards being a transfer and transnational network organisation with a unique combination of politics, media and culture including publishing houses, film producers, intellectuals and artists, social politics and broadcasting ... Its productions, appeals, events and publications were to provide a systematic counter-propaganda "that was created in order to attract the widest possible public."⁵⁸ Even "en miniature", the IAH came undoubtedly closest to embodying the "Cultural International".

57 As a pro-Communist section in the World Union of Worker Esperantists (Weltbund der Arbeiter-Esperantisten/Sennacieca Asocio Tutmonda, SAT).

58 A systematic approach to the special forms of networking and the propaganda activity within the Münzenberg organisations was provided by French Germanist Hélène Roussel. See: Hélène Roussel, "Zu Willi Münzenbergs verlegerischer Tätigkeit im Kontext seiner Medientätigkeit in der Weimarer Republik und im französischen Exil. Überlegungen zu ihrem jeweiligen Stellenwert", in Hélène Roussel, Lutz Winckler (eds), *Deutsche Exilpresse und Frankreich* (Bern/Wien: Peter Lang, 1992), pp. 157ff.

Amongst the national and transnational centres of activities mentioned before we find most diversified organisational forms, such as Supplementary National and Transnational Centres of Activity with International Radiation (see Table 1.2), Supplementary Initiatives at the National level with International Radiation and Cultural Diplomacy Organisations (CDOs, see Table 1.3) and Soviet Organisations and Initiatives Invoking International Solidarity.

TABLE 1.2 *Supplementary National and Transnational Centres of Activity with International Radiation*

The International Organisations and Initiatives Against Fascism and War, The World Committee Against the Imperialist War (8/1932–8/1933);⁵⁹ The Anti-Fascist Bureau (before 1933); The Institute for the Study of Fascism, Paris (1933–ca 1935); The International Anti-Fascist Archive, Paris (1933); The World Relief Committee for the Victims of German Fascism, Paris (1933); The Reichstag Trial Defence Committee, London; The International Commission of Legal Inquiry into the Reichstag Fire; The Dimitroff Committee for the Release of the Reichstag Prisoners; The World Committee Against War and Fascism (1933–1939); The World Youth Committee Against War and Fascism (1933–); The World Students' Committee Against War and Fascism (1933–); The International Women's Committee Against War and Fascism (1934–1939);⁶⁰ The World Sports Committee Against War and Fascism; The World Committee of Free-Thinkers Against War and Fascisms; The International Committee for the Liberation of G. Dimitroff, E. Thälmann, E. Torgler, B. Popov, V. Tanev and All Imprisoned Anti-Fascists, ("Thälmann-Committee"), Paris (1934); The International Committee for the Defence of the Ethiopian People (1935); The International Student Federation for Peace, Freedom and Culture, Brussels (1934–);⁶¹ The World Committee of the Young for Peace, Freedom and Progress (1936);⁶² The World Union for Peace (1936–1938/1939);⁶³ The International Anti-War Documentation Bureau; The International Bureau for Asylum and Relief for Political Prisoners; The International Committee of Co-Ordination and Information for Aid to Republican Spain; The Committee for the Liberation of Carlos Prestes; The National Committee for China; The Propaganda Commission.

⁵⁹ Variant: Amsterdam-Pleyel Movement.

⁶⁰ Variant: World Committee of Women Against War and Fascism.

⁶¹ Variant: Mouvement international de la jeunesse estudiantine contre la guerre et le fascisme, established in Brussels.

⁶² Variant: Youth Movement for Peace, Freedom and Progress.

⁶³ Variant: World Union for Peace, established in Brussels.

TABLE 1.3 *Cultural Diplomacy Organisations*

The Commission for Foreign Aid to Russia at the Soviet's Executive Committee (The United Information Bureau); The All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) (1925–1927); The Soviet Red Cross and the Humanitarian Organisations; The Foreign Committee of the Soviet Federation of Trade Unions; The Soviet Section of the International Exhibitions, Paris and New York (1935–1939); The International Departments of the People's Commissariats for Foreign Trade, Plan, Education, Public Health, etc.; The Commission for Foreign Aid at the Presidium of the Central Soviet Executive Committee (1923–1925); Intourist; The Editorial for Foreign Language Literature and other editorial houses (Mezhdunarodnaja Kniga etc.); The International Department of the Central Committee of VKP(b); The International Pan-Slavonic Committee; The International Anti-Fascist Committees; The State Committee for Cultural Relations at the Soviet Council of Ministers; The Soviet Information Bureau at the State Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign States at the Council of Ministers of the USSR (Sovinformbiuro) (1941–1961); The Foreign Commission of the Federation of Writers of the USSR; The Communist Academy; The Federation of Soviet Societies for the Friendship with Foreign States (1941–1966); The Federation of Composers of the USSR; The Federation of Architects of the USSR; Proletkult and other intellectual and artistic organisations; The All-Union Federation for Export and Import of Movie Films (Soveteksportfilm, Lenfilm, etc.).

*Supplementary Initiatives at the National Level with
International Radiation*

These types of organisations and initiatives are only presented in a selective way. Often their core was national as they were established on the initiative of a specific, individual Communist party. Nevertheless, their radiation was transnational. Here we find editorial houses, societies and associations like Jewish cultural and political associations, the literary-cultural Clarté movement (France), artistic movements e.g. the "Muralistas" of Mexico, the Dada and the Surrealist movements..., The working pool of socio-political organisations (Arbeitsgemeinschaft sozialpolitischer Organisationen/ARSO of the German CP), reading associations and book clubs (e.g. The Left Book Club, Great Britain), regional or local anti-colonial and cultural Movements and initiatives arising independently from the Anti-Imperialist League, for example in Central and South Asia (Iran, India and the Caucasus). This group does not contain

the national sections of the large international organisations and those of the sympathising organisations for special purposes.

Cultural Diplomacy Organisations (CDOs) and Soviet Organisations and Initiatives Invoking International Solidarity

While the organisations listed above were located within the narrower or larger framework of the Comintern, the Soviet Union itself maintained a certain number of organisations with transnational radiation serving the special interests of cultural diplomacy. These state oriented or state organisations as such operated in a bilateral or international way for a certain number of specific purposes like tourism, scientific and cultural exchange etc. The differences between these two types of organisations can be highlighted by looking at the biographies of Willi Münzenberg on the one hand, and Olga Kameneva, (Trotsky's sister and wife of Lev Kamenev), on the other. Both operated a huge international network: Kameneva was the Director of the Soviet All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS).⁶⁴ She was a sort of Russian equivalent to Münzenberg and the IAH. In both cases "progressive" Western intellectuals belonged to the main target groups.⁶⁵

Between these two types, there existed also hybrid and mixed forms. One example is the Universal Rally for Peace (*Rassemblement Universel pour la Paix/RUP*), which was founded in 1935 on a Soviet initiative while it was built up largely by Münzenberg, using his contacts on the global political stage.⁶⁶ Originally, this initiative started with an appeal from the Soviet Federation of Trade Unions on the occasion of the Italian-Abyssinian War, the aim of which was worldwide support for a so-called diplomacy of peace. An exceptionally huge number of Social Democrats co-operated in this initiative, amongst them Victor Schiff, Rudolf Breitscheid and Friedrich Stampfer, with Sir Robert Cecil acting as Chairman, and Philip Noel-Baker, Salomon Grumbach, Pierre Cot etc. as supporters. Although this organisation had a slightly more open character compared to the Amsterdam-Pleyel Movement in 1932, in fact the European

64 See: Fayet, *VOKS. Le laboratoire helvétique*; also id., "La VOKS, la société pour les échanges culturels entre l'URSS et l'étranger", *Relations internationales* 114/115 (2003), pp. 411–423.

65 Hereto: Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome. Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931–41* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Fayet, *VOKS*.

66 Ursula Langkau-Alex, "Das Rassemblement Universel pour la Paix, die Sektion der deutschen Exulanten und der Weltfriedenskongreß in Brüssel, 1936", in Sigrid Bock, Wolfgang Klein, Dietrich Scholze (eds.), *Die Waffen nieder! Schriftsteller in den Friedensbewegungen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1989), pp. 201–210 and 330–332.

Congress against Fascism and War, which convened in the Paris Pleyel Hall on 4–6 June 1933 and which operated under the auspices of Comintern, may be understood as being a direct tool of the Soviet state and its foreign policy in order to attract individuals to the Stalinist regime and its "peace policy" exert a more effective pressure on the League of Nations in order to attempt to convince the world of the Soviet Union's peaceful intentions.

The Comintern and the "Cultural International" between Internationalism and Soviet-dominated Nationalism

Periodisation and Re-assessment. The Different Stages of the Comintern and the "Cultural International": The Six Phases Model

Roughly six stages of the Comintern's history are distinguishable: the first phase from 1919 to 1924 under the slogan of the "International Revolution for the Sake of Russia", the second stage under the slogan of "Socialism in One Country" which led to a number of strategic defeats of the Comintern in the international field (e.g. in Britain and China) from 1924 to 1928. This was followed by the so-called "Third Period" under the slogan of the "Defence of the Soviet Union by all means" corresponding to the Stalinisation process of the Comintern (1928–1934). The fourth stage under the Popular Fronts tactics opened up to a process of "nationalisation" – within the Communist movement, with the Communist parties in particular offering a picture of de-internationalisation and isolation as a consequence of the Stalinist terror, which in turn opened up an era of new defensive strategies and, ultimately, to the dissolution of the Comintern (1935–1939). In its fifth stage, from 1939–1941, both the Comintern and international Communism functioned as an auxiliary protection for the alliance between Stalin and Hitler and the end of anti-Fascism and Left-wing solidarity. In response to the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, anti-Fascism was recreated but the Comintern was functionalised within the "Great Patriotic War". This final sixth stage ended with the dissolution of the Communist International in the middle of WWII (1943).

During the first phase *grosso modo* until 1928/1929, organisations like the IAH and the LAI carried a message of "hopes of a revolutionary development of the civil society into the global society". By conveying this message, these two organisations occupied an intermediate position between the revolutionary political and social movements and the remaining elements of the "universalistic-rationalistic fundamental structure of modernity".⁶⁷ During its

67 Stickler, *Nichtregierungsorganisationen*.

second stage in the 1930s, the re-nationalisation and the process of adjustment of the formal organisations to the Soviet style instructions prevented the Comintern from developing any further global emancipatory alternatives (Armin Stickler) leading to the disruption of the “Cultural International” from within.

The medial and cross-cultural aspect of the solidarity organisations is vital and explains their esteem and validation by intellectuals, writers, artists etc. Much of the character of the Weimar Republic as a projection screen for the artistic, literary and cultural elite was due to these movements highlighting the role of intellectuals in society as *Kulturschaffende* (“workers in the field of culture”). The articles in this anthology show that after the First World War, at least in the case of Germany and France, a large proportion of intellectuals were to be found within the Communist movement and not in the Social Democratic parties.

Under bureaucratic Stalinism, the more open and more horizontal networks in particular were either more strictly controlled, re-organised in the context of transition into a cultural diplomacy or definitively dissolved. This erosion of more de-centralised transnational networks was a hidden agenda of party Communism.⁶⁸ By means of a paradoxical de-internationalisation process, carried on in the name of the Communist International, its “solar system” was dismantled. Language, emblematic symbols and slogans like *international solidarity*, *anti-Fascism*, *the threat of war*, *anti-imperialism*, *the fight for peace* became useful assets utilised to enhance the personal cults of the Communist leaders. Nevertheless, and even in spite of Stalinism, the attraction of the Soviet Union and the general conviction not just amongst people of the Left to defend it, through an anti-Fascist reflex contributed both to a remaining influence of the sterilised party-Communism and to a positive public perception worldwide, especially after the victory against Nazi Germany in 1945.

However, the Comintern’s institutional charisma, its initial avantgardistic practice has been a driving force for global ideological and cultural transfer. The question remains why such a fledgling “Cultural International” was dissolved. For a historical review of the international solidarity organisations, internal causes and “objective” world-historical factors can be cited. Objectively, their development substantiates the inherent fragility of this specific type of social movement. In fact, they are dependent on mediation within a framework of institutional logics which is alien to them, primarily Soviet and Comintern politics. Therefore, they always have to take into account the possibility of disintegration and destruction, even from within.

68 For the positive paradigm which goes reversely see: Manuel Castells, *The Rise of Network Society* (Balden: Blackwell, 1996).

On the other hand, objective moments are also constitutive for this development. So, the historical path to international networking took place not in the context of a global simultaneity that was achieved only with globalisation in the 21st century, but in the context of a predominantly nationally-dominated unsimultaneity. The time for a global civil society had not yet come. In the following paragraphs, the stages of this transformation processes will be analysed on the background of the entangled organisational and structural history of the Cultural International.

Stage 1: International Revolution for the Sake of Soviet Russia (1919–1924)

Until the mid-1920s, a multitude of revolutionary strategic alignments were set up in order to build a "World Federation of Socialist Soviet Republics". Beyond "European revolutions", the anti-colonial national liberation struggle was proclaimed at the Baku Congress (1920) and especially for the eastern and southern border states of the Soviet Union. The Bolshevik "Affirmative Action Empire" strategy (Terry Martin) served as a tool to advance the interests of national minorities in the new National Republics.⁶⁹ The defeat suffered in Europe (the German revolution in particular) during the post-war crisis 1918–1923 marked the termination of international revolution as a guiding principle, instead pushing forward Sovietisation as a structural device of international Communism. In the first stage of Bolshevik politics at least, the Bolshevik Revolution delayed further disintegration of the Tsarist Empire, and partial successes in the creation of a multinational state were achieved by the Affirmative Empire strategy. From 1924–1925 onwards, due to the defeats of European revolutions, most of the geostrategical re-alignments were confined to the periphery, especially to the East.

In an initial phase from 1921–1926, Mezhrabpom, the "Workers' International Relief" was the most important example of this new type of solidarity organisation. Echoing an international appeal launched by Maksim Gorky, it was founded in Berlin as the "International Committee to support Starving Russia" as a relief effort to eradicate hunger and to restore the Soviet economy in September 1921, on the initiative of the Executive Committee of the Comintern. The IAH was also the first to put "culture" in a worldwide propaganda perspective, with the aim of creating and distributing information media, organising

69 The affirmative action concept has been developed by Terry Martin. See: Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

tours of Soviet artists and scientists, conference cycles on humanitarian missions in Russia (e.g. the Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen and the delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Georges Montandon). Notable artists and intellectuals had been appointed as leading members of the IAH committees (in Germany: Albert Einstein, George Grosz, Maximilian Harden, Käthe Kollwitz) and the media network was constructed by creating their own film studios such as the Mezhrabpom-Film and publishing houses like the Neuer Deutscher Verlag, which published, among other things, the IAH newspaper *Sowjetrussland im Bild* (Soviet Russia in Pictures).

Alongside the initiatives co-ordinated by Willi Münzenberg, the United Information Office for Foreign Aid to Russia (OBI) was established at the Executive Committee in September 1923 under the direction of Olga Kameneva. In this way, information and co-ordination concerning all sorts of foreign aid to the Soviet Union, including that from liberal and philanthropic circles, could be brought together under one roof. Important target groups for this emerging state “cultural diplomacy” were journalists, medical, scientific and humanitarian circles in particular.

The Soviet All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS), which replaced the OBI in 1925, continued the promotion of this “cultural work” towards the liberal professions and advanced bourgeois circles in order to create “an alternative space for the sympathy outside the traditional milieus of Communist environment”.⁷⁰ Later on, it supervised a number of national friendship societies or associations for cultural relations with the Soviet Union and was subordinated to the control of both the Party, the State and the NKID (People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs) – both on the financing and the appointment of their leaders, often directed by a hidden operating Communist fraction within its organisational core. For international campaigns, however, the Agitprop Department of the ECCI and the Comintern remained in charge.

Stage 2: Socialism in One Country and Strategic International Defeats (1924–1928)

During its second period (1924–1928), the central administrative core of the CPSU shed its centralist and bureaucratic control over the Comintern, the new Stalin and Bukharin paradigm of “Socialism in One Country” (from 1925 onwards) implied the validation of the national and territorial principle which, at the same time, provoked strong inner-party battles. In the anticolonial struggle for national independence, Comintern-supported anti-Communist

⁷⁰ Hereto Fayet, “La VOKS”.

nationalists like the Chinese Kuomintang. Contemporary Soviet civilising missions, exceptionalism and cross-cultural co-existence were overshadowed by a new Great Russian technical and cultural colonialism. Its ideological, organisational and political alignment to the CPSU and "Marxism-Leninism" ("Bolshevisation", "Stalinisation") made the Comintern lose revolutionary momentum, accelerated by the defeat and expulsions of Left-wing oppositionists headed by Trotsky and Zinoviev, while revolutionary activities were replaced by eclectic or opportunistic practices like the Anglo-Russian Committee in 1926 (from the Soviet side) or the strategy of mixed Communist and national liberation parties like the Kuomintang, which led to a catastrophic defeat of the Comintern in China and elsewhere.

Precisely during this second phase, the systematic development of the Sympathizing Organisations For Specific Purposes was begun, which was a specific feature of the Bukharin period in the Comintern and still represented a transitional stage to Stalinism.⁷¹ From 1926 onwards, the existing solidarity organisations were subject to even stricter rules. At the Sixth Plenum of the ECCI in 1926, internal guidelines were adopted, significantly under the guidance of the Comintern Secretary Otto Kuusinen, who pledged a further extension of the Comintern's "solar system". Above their "own" party structure, the Communist parties were instructed to build Communist fractions within the workers' associations and federations in their own countries, contributing to the formation of a broad spectrum of sympathetic organisations. Empiric examples of new organisations crossing over into the national sections were the Proletarian Free-Thinkers, the Proletarian Esperantists, the Worker-Photography Movement, the associations of front-line fighters (*Frontkämpfer*) and other proletarian military organisations. Significantly, for most of these network structures, the KPD was the still most advanced transnational model.

During the later phase of Stalinisation, several non-party and sympathetic organisations (including peace organisations) were no longer conceived as being collective member organisations. Henceforth, collective memberships of entire organisations, initiatives etc. were preferred. The rather bureaucratic

71 See some of the basic documents containing the decisions taken in regard to the definition and co-ordination of the different networks in: Hermann Weber, Jakov S. Drabkin, Jakov S. Drabkin, Bernhard H. Bayerlein (eds.), *Deutschland-Russland-Komintern 1918–1943*. Unter Mitarbeit von Gleb J. Albert, Marina Korčagina und Natal'ja Lebedeva, vol. II. *Nach der Archivrevolution: Neuerschlossene Quellen zur Geschichte der KPD und den deutsch-russischen Beziehungen* (Berlin/München/Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 509–523. (Open access, see <http://www.degruyter.com/view/product/212875>.)

leaderships that arose from these arrangements were often transformed into special committees, which proved to be flexible because they no longer required constant feedback from the membership. Such organisations were also constructed in order to encompass specific cultural and artistically creative areas (for instance the International Confederation of Revolutionary Theatre and the international writers' organisations). While the Comintern's guidelines instructed the organisation to carry out a variety of professional activities, the development of more independent forms of organisation within the field of workers' education and recreational associations remained optional. Again, more flexible national solutions were now being introduced. The transnational and international merging of networks was to be avoided from now on. Regardless of its concrete form, the principle was maintained that the Communist party members involved in these organisations always had to act as a hidden fraction, as a Communist group.

Stage 3: The "Third Period" and the Defence of the Soviet Union by All Means (1928–1934)

After the proclamation of a "Third Period" (which lasted from 1928 to 1934) as a stage of capitalist crisis, of imminent war against the Soviet Union and of radicalised struggles and ideological confrontations, Social Democrats were pushed away for being "Social Fascists" and declared to be the primary enemy (directing even more hostility at them rather than at the National Socialists), while defensive programmes "for national and social liberation" alternated with an intensification of street fighting. Revolutionary playgrounds and/or alliances with nationalist movements and progressive caudillos (Latin America) were allowed or tolerated. The "class against class" strategy catapulted the Communist parties into vain contests, deepening their crises and hitting the organisations in the colonial and semi-colonial countries even harder. As a number of new Communist parties were now established, their number rose, even though they were often extremely small.

Contemporary Soviet civilising missions, exceptionalism and multicultural co-existence were overshadowed by looming inner colonialism. Despite the strategic direction and master narratives, none of these movements, Communist parties or specially-prepared armed Comintern detachments (e.g. in Brasil 1935) achieved either an anti-colonial revolution or a successful uprising in a single country. Charismatic figures like Jawarhalal Nehru from India, Julio Antonio Mella and Diego Rivera from Cuba and Mexico, Mohammed Hatta from Indonesia were either ousted or left the Comintern. Given their dual transition either as an adjunct of Communist-slaughtering Kuomintang in China and later as a spearhead against the Social Democrats and the whole of the non-Communist Left-wing currents, the "Cultural International" proved to be a

child that had been born at the wrong time.⁷² The German catastrophe of 1933, when the Comintern rejected joint action by the workers' movement against the rise of Hitler and National Socialism, also meant the dislocation of the "solar system". In the 1930s, Left and Right oppositionists also split definitively, while Trotsky aimed to create a Fourth International after the lack of anti-Stalinist resistance within the Comintern. Giving up its role as a global revolutionary player (including the endorsement of the modernisation of the Soviet Union), the Comintern was progressively converted into a self-legitimising sound board for a new Great Russian statehood.

At the same time as this so-called "Third Period" of the class struggles, a fight was begun against all non-Communist Left-wing currents along with the "cleansing" or even splitting of several of these organisations. The promotion and defence of the Soviet Union became a quasi-eschatological dogma. In the increasingly Stalinised International, a contradictory process began to take shape: the more numerous the initiatives directly launched by the Soviet Union to convey a positive image of her, the more uniform their concepts and modes of practice became. This phenomenon now affected all sympathising organisations, not only the culturally-oriented institutions, academies, writers' and artists' associations, but also Soviet government organisations such as the People's Commissariats of Foreign Trade, planning, education and public health, trade unions and sports associations etc. However, co-ordinated by Münzenberg, the anti-Fascist and anti-war initiatives that attempted to counteract this, were at least partially successful – see the counter-campaign to the Reichstag Fire trial. Münzenberg, the Communist from Thuringia, who was already largely acting on his own initiative, had with his peripheral organisations created an "Intermediate Empire" (Karl Schlögel), a new centre of anti-Fascism in Europe, which was no longer simply dependent upon the instructions of either the Comintern or the KPD. Even Stalin, Dimitrov and the Comintern in a certain sense still had to rely on these networks.

For all of the aforementioned organisations and currents, the 1930s signified both the consolidation of the rule of Stalinism within the Soviet Union and the onset of the Comintern's disintegration, which occurred after a dynamic construction phase during the 1920s. The main reason for this was the Comintern's own multiple failures.

Phase 4: Popular Fronts, "Re-Nationalisation" and New Defensive Strategies of the Communist Movements (1935–1939)

Initiating the fourth period, the 1935 Seventh Comintern World Congress, under the new slogan of the "Popular Fronts", formally recognised a withdrawal

72 Cf. Broué, *Histoire de l'Internationale Communiste*, pp. 447f.

not only from the original revolutionary Bolshevik project in the capitalist centres but also from the united front (*Einheitsfront*) of its first years and the “Baku line” for the “Peoples of the East” decided by the 1920 congress in the city of the same name as an interconnected process of anti-imperialist revolution and national liberation.⁷³ In the Soviet Union itself, emancipation of national minorities was finally transformed into the punishment of peoples, a new Soviet colonialism led to deportations of entire peoples and national minorities. The Comintern partly overcame its divisionism but abandoned its part as a global player and preferred the integration of the Communist parties into Nation States, while the Soviet Union itself strove to have good relations with both the Mussolini and Hitler regimes. In the case of the Italian attack on Abyssinia, anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism was abandoned which, for the first time since its foundation, led to a significant two-pronged constellation between Comintern politics and, more particularly, Soviet policy.

Reinforced by the strengthening of the social movements, and finally as a reaction against the Fascist menace, membership of the parties rose once again in France, Spain, Chile and in several other countries. However, the transition of the Soviet Union into “bureaucratic absolutism”, and sometimes even “systemic paranoia” during the second half of the 1930s,⁷⁴ ending with the Terror and the Great Purges, did not leave the Comintern untouched, particularly considering the fact that the Comintern was also at this time on the verge of being destroyed and its foreign relations having being severed. Anti-Fascist initiatives (France, Spain, Chile) were counteracted by incremental control and the repression of radical social movements, as well as by the tactics of individual terror, caudillismo, manufactured uprisings (Brazil 1935) or espionage for the Soviet Union in all areas. This repressive transformation strengthened intermediate oppositionist Communist and anti-Stalinist currents.

During the Spanish Civil War, former victories were counterbalanced by fighting the “Trotskyists” which helped in the final defeat of the Republicans. The symbolic and charismatic International Brigades were not entitled to be the “winners” in the Spanish Civil War. While in the metropolis, national coalitions with Social-Democratic and even with “bourgeois” partners were the main objective, major contradictions were created by the hegemonic pretension of Soviet politics towards the peripheries and the colonial world. While anti-imperialist claims dominated until the mid-thirties (see the South African CP and the National Congress), Popular Front politics since 1935 marked the acceptance of the colonial mandates of the great powers (see Syria and

73 Immanuel Wallerstein, *Social Science and the Communist Interlude*.

74 Moshe Lewin, *The Soviet Century* (London-New York: Verso, 2005).

Lebanon) and the curbing of anti-colonial movements. While the Comintern survived this crisis with heavy losses, the Terror phase marked the definitive end of the "Cultural International".

Degradation, De-internationalisation and Liquidation of the "Cultural International" as Part of the Transformation of International Communism

The Soviet Union's transition to nationalism and terror under Stalin led to a degradation of its original transnational networks and the imposition of a secret and sealed-off bureaucratic structure. The Comintern was on the verge of being destroyed as a result of Stalin's Great Purges. Its direct liquidation phase was accompanied by a general de-internationalisation process of the transnational networks, the suppression of transnational communications and a shortage of financial resources, which increased control, disintegration and finally led to the dissolution of the majority of these transnational networks. Consequently, its organisations were sealed off against transnational influences with the help of secret cadre control and the secret services. The disintegration of its social morphology by the transformation of the transnational and more horizontally-orientated networks of the Comintern's "soft skills" and socio-political, cultural and intellectual associations from within led to the dismantling of the beyond-party and sympathetic solidarity organisations. One of the first victims was Münzenberg's IAH. Despite the officially proclaimed return of the Comintern to the principles of the "United and Popular Front", this phase meant the almost complete dismantling of organisations after the networks and especially the transnational governing structures were declared to be illegal, as most of them were stationed in Germany. The IAH's activities were to be continued from Paris, while the LAI's activities were to be continued from London, but in neither case would the organisations be entirely re-constructed.

While the majority of sympathising organisations had been dissolved by 1936/1937 (most likely due to their potential threat to Stalin's increasingly Russo-centric policies), the international "cultural diplomacy" organisations, directly linked to Soviet structures and state interests, were maintained. As in the case of the Rassemblement Universel pour la Paix (RUP), which was tasked with promoting peace initiatives through the League of Nations (to which the Soviet Union had belonged since 1934), in addition to the classic state instruments of foreign policy (the diplomatic and consular apparatus) and the international network of political parties (Comintern), the USSR also possessed other avenues through which to continue their political and cultural propaganda using their worldwide networks. While the League Against Imperialism

was dissolved, the International Red Aid survived the Terror period, although it was highly controlled by Soviet institutions. Organisations such as the International Workers' Aid were literally filleted and dismantled on instructions from the Comintern. Its commissioners included the Swiss Karl Hofmeyer and the Czech Bohumir Šmeral who sent insightful reports to the Executive Committee of the Comintern on both the dissolution of the "Münzenberg organisations" and the anti-Fascist exile publishers in France.⁷⁵

The Nazis' ascendancy to power also meant the beginning of the end of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, when its leading figure George Padmore, who had been expelled from Germany, also broke with the Comintern. Again, as Holger Weiss' books and articles show, the Committee's transnational connections were severed from within, for instance those with British West Africa.⁷⁶ What had initially been a benchmark for a new International for workers with a black skin, was finally dissolved in June 1937. The International of Seamen and Harbour Workers' had already been dissolved a month earlier.⁷⁷

Stages 5 and 6: Auxiliary Protection for the Alliance between Stalin and Hitler (1939–1941) and the Re-creation of Anti-Fascism for the Purpose of the "Great Patriotic War" (1941–1943)

As a strategic pact for a new world order, the Stalin-Hitler Non-Aggression and Friendship Pacts of August and September 1939 signified the end of Left-wing solidarity as fundamental principle of Internationalism since the nineteenth century. Being a major transcultural shock, it also meant the end of the anti-Fascist policy of the Comintern and the collective security illusion that still persisted in parts of world public opinion in relation to Soviet politics. In 1941, this global strategic pact for a new world order was again discarded by the German attack against the Soviet Union, supplanted by the Soviet Union's victory in WWII, and rapidly erased in the historical memory.

75 See: Bernhard H. Bayerlein, "Deutscher Kommunismus und transnationaler Stalinismus. Komintern, KPD und Sowjetunion 1929–1943. Neue Dokumente zur Konzeptualisierung einer verbundenen Geschichte", in Hermann Weber, Jakov Drabkin, Bernhard H. Bayerlein, *Deutschland-Russland-Komintern. I. Überblick, Analysen, Diskussionen. Neue Perspektiven auf die Geschichte der KPD und die Deutsch-Russischen Beziehungen (1918–1943)* (Berlin-München: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 225–400. Freely accessible under www.degruyter.com/viewbooktoc/product/186108.

76 See Chapter 7 of this volume.

77 See Chapter 6 of this volume.

The official disruption of the Comintern's activities in May 1943, at the height of World War II, was in fact only a partial dissolution. Soviet structures took over the organising of international activities, raising combatants for the European Résistance and serving Stalin's policy during World War II through their organisation of the prisoners-of-war, espionage and terror commandos behind the lines. The official dissolution of the Comintern was not only a concession to the Allies but also a step towards a "re-nationalisation" of the Communist parties, in order to both prevent centrifugal movements within and allow them a greater flexibility in a new post-war order.

The remaining cultural diplomacy organisations were functionalised within the new concept of the "Great Patriotic War". Even the International Red Aid survived only in the form of its Soviet section, which was re-mobilised in order to commit itself to the war. Whereas under the pact with Hitler, the Comintern and Soviet politics strengthened anti-colonial, specially anti-British and anti-French movements, after the German attack against the Soviet Union in 1941, anti-colonial movements were restricted and subordinated to the interests of the anti-Hitler coalition of the Allied forces. Anti-imperialism was once again weakened and the representative movements had to be opposed. Instructions were given to the Communist parties even to counter the national liberation movements, not only in India (see the example of Gandhi and the Indian National Congress) but also in the Arab countries. After 1945, however, the tide of Soviet politics changed again and more extensive support was once again given to these movements, sometimes even to the detriment of the domestic Communist Parties. There was no longer any place for relatively autonomous international non-party mass organisations.

The Big Question: The Comintern, the Soviet Union and the Anti-Fascist Reflex after the 1933 Catastrophe

Hitler's coming to power in 1933 was a European and global disaster. At the same time, it signalled the worst defeat of both the Comintern and the Soviet Union. The origin of the ensuing international anti-Fascist campaign, which was organised by Münzenberg and his team under the slogans "Freedom for Dimitrov and Thälmann", "counter-process" and "Brown Book" and which entered into the collective memory of the world, is still controversial. Nevertheless, these campaigns subsequently provided the Comintern and the Soviet Union with an anti-Fascist charisma. Due to the newly available documents, it can now be assumed that the counter-trial campaign and the "Brown Book", which attracted a great deal of international attention and formed a new

anti-Fascist repertoire, had to be carried out in the face of strong opposition from within both the German Communist Party and the Comintern, while Stalin, the Soviet leadership and the Comintern afforded it only limited support.⁷⁸

Previously unpublished Münzenberg letters to Stalin reveal the origin of the campaign and show that the initiative originated neither from the Comintern nor from the Soviet Union, but largely from the personal skill and talent of Münzenberg and his associates Otto Katz ("André Simone"), Louis Gibarti and writers and intellectuals such as Romain Rolland and Henri Barbusse.⁷⁹ In a private letter written in April 1933, Münzenberg directed a passionate appeal to Stalin to finally initiate an effective mass propaganda against Fascism, especially against the passivity of the KPD leadership. This brought only partial results. A comprehensive anti-Fascist mobilisation campaign was not carried out and, after January 1933, the Comintern aimed to achieve a more general "struggle for peace" (as it was practised later under the Stalin-Hitler Pact). The view that the Soviet Union's peace slogans were in fact embedded within a revolutionary strategy is no longer tenable.⁸⁰ The KPD did not give the threat of Nazism sufficient attention, particularly the national and social demagoguery of the NSDAP and its ubiquitous violence. A strategic policy of anti-Fascism did not yet exist. However, in April 1933, the Comintern renounced its plans for a massive anti-Fascist propaganda campaign, and instead it continued its anti-Social Democratic and anti-war campaign – not specifically oriented against Hitler as its main enemy. Not only was its "Social Fascism" against Social Democracy position maintained, but still, in mid-1933, the sharp distinction between its

78 The official Soviet Union refrained from a fundamental protest against the initiation of the Reichstag Fire trial proceedings which was planned by the Nazis to be a degrading show trial. While the trial was being held, the Soviet Politburo even instructed the government newspaper *Izvestiya* to refrain from any criticisms in its reports and articles which might give the impression of any criticisms directed against individual members of the Nazi government. See further Leonid V. Maksimenkov (ed.), *Bol'shaja cenzura. Pisateli i žurnalisty v strane sovetov 1917–1956* (Moskva: MFD, 2005), pp. 300f.

79 Almost at the same time, the Comintern vehemently opposed a trade boycott against Nazi Germany launched by Jewish and workers' organisations in the US, see: Weber/Drabkin/Bayerlein, *Deutschland. Russland. Komintern*, pp. 1039–1042; cf. K.K. Širinja, *Komintern v 1933 gody* (Moskva: Ekspres-Press, 2006), p. 433.

80 See, for example, in the case of the Dutch Communist Party: Wim Pelt, *Vrede door Revolutie. De CPN tijdens het Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact 1939–1941. Akademisch Proefschrift* (Phil. Diss. Univ. Amsterdam, 's-Gravenhage, SDU uitgeverij, 1990). Even for the period after 1945, the thesis of a revolutionary orientation of Stalin's policy was still being claimed, particularly for the semi-colonial and colonial world. Andreas Hilger asserts this for the southern hemisphere (Hilger, *Die Sowjetunion und die Dritte Welt*, p. 7).

anti-war and anti-Fascist activities was continued. The former were funded, the latter barely at all.⁸¹

On the other hand, the acquittal of Dimitrov and his co-accused in the Reichstag Fire trial, which partially obliterated the catastrophic defeat in the beginning of the year, was celebrated by the Comintern as a great victory over Nazism, and incorporated into its propaganda campaign. Public opinion globally accepted the victory of this campaign, organised from Paris and London (and not from Moscow), which became both a beacon and a legend. For the Nazis, the Reichstag Fire trial was actually a major defeat.

Hitler's seizure of power certainly was the most momentous turning point in the 20th century for the international labour movement. The Soviet Union did not respond with a severing of diplomatic relations, nor even with any protests.⁸² While thousands of Communist party members were being persecuted by means of terror, the Comintern spoke only of a brief retreat that would accelerate the downfall of the Hitler regime.⁸³ The Soviet Union, on the other hand, demanded a sign from Hitler of his good-will on foreign policy. In fact, the dictator sent this sign.⁸⁴ Stalin spared the Hitler government, but its strategies against Social Democracy and "Social Fascism" continued as a doctrine of Soviet government policy. About the same time as tens of thousands of members of the KPD were arrested, as a result of the Reichstag's emergency decrees, an extended protocol of the Berlin Treaty between Germany and the Soviet Union from 1926, which followed the Treaty of Rapallo, was ratified. Good economic relations had continued untouched for nearly two years. A recent

81 Siegfried Bahne, *Die KPD und das Ende von Weimar. Das Scheitern einer Politik 1932–1935* (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus, 1976), pp. 58ff., 68ff.

82 Specifically in this crucial period, the Soviet Union intervened only on diplomatic side issues. See the so-called "conflict of journalists" in 1933: Gennadij Bordjugov, "Die Machtergreifung Hitlers. Dominanten aussenpolitischer Entscheidungen des Stalin-Regimes 1933–1934", in Ludmila Thomas, Viktor Knoll (eds.), *Zwischen Tradition und Revolution. Determinanten und Strukturen sowjetischer Außenpolitik 1917–1941* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2000), p. 377; G. Adibekov, A. Di B'jadzo, F. Gori e.a. (eds.), *Politbjuro CK RKP(b) – VKP(b) i Evropa. Resenija "Osoboj Papki" 1923–1939* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2001), p. 296.

83 Resolution des Präsidiums des EKKI zum Bericht des Gen. Heckert über die Lage in Deutschland (1.4.1933), RGASPI 495/2/203, 10–12

84 In a conversation with Soviet Ambassador Chinčuk, Hitler said on 28 April 1933 that "our two countries" were to "recognise the inviolability of the fact of mutual existence for a long time" and that their activities must proceed on the basis of this fact. "Regardless of the different worldview of both states" these were linked by "common interests" and he added that this relationship would wear a "permanent character" (*Dokumenty Vnesnej Politiki*, vol. xvi [Moskva, 1970], p. 271).

evaluation of the Soviet Politburo's protocols confirms Stalin's good-will policy towards the Nazi government. From January 1933 until about 1935, not one political decision of the Soviet Politburo as the supreme political body of the Soviet Union was explicitly directed against the Nazi regime.⁸⁵

The Last "Münzenberg Empire" as the Answer to the Abandonment of Left-wing Solidarity: *Die Zukunft* (1938–1940)

Münzenberg was finally forced out of both the KPD and the Comintern in 1937/1938 after the "Cultural International" had been smashed, but anti-Fascist initiatives, book publishers and magazines continued their work, especially in exile. His expulsion came as indiscretions reached the public, according to whom he had referred to the show trials in the Soviet Union as a "farce".⁸⁶ On behalf of the Comintern Secretariat, the Czech "Cominternist" Šmeral began trying to either control or dissolve the remaining international committees as well as the publishing houses and other anti-Fascist initiatives. This process of de-globalisation may be regarded as a historical paradigm for dismantling international, possibly horizontally-oriented transnational networks from the inside, using state power and their clandestine structures. As Münzenberg's deputies Otto Katz, Louis Gibarti and Louis Dolivet were probably all recruited by the Soviet secret service, the NKVD, the conclusion is obvious that it was not Münzenberg who was the main actor of a planned conspiracy, like it is depicted in some mostly journalistic accounts, but rather it was he himself who was both the target and the victim of a huge conspiracy. One year previously, he had published his book *Propaganda als Waffe* (Propaganda as

85 Bayerlein, "Deutscher Kommunismus und transnationaler Stalinismus", pp. 275ff. Even in the German radio broadcasts about the Reichstag Fire trial "members of the government" were not to be challenged (RGASPI 17/163/990, 208).

86 Citing the press organ of the Swiss Trotskyist *Trotz Alledem!*, the press service of the Fourth International on 22 February, 1937 published a message entitled "Münzenberg, Stalin's businessman, admits the forgeries of the Moscow Trials". Münzenberg is said to have no longer believed what the workers were being told about Trotsky ("Contre-procès en Suisse. Münzenberg, homme d'affaire de Staline, avoue les faux des Procès de Moscou", *Service d'information et de presse pour la Quatrième Internationale*, Paris, 22.2.1937, publ. in Bernhard H. Bayerlein, André Lasserre (eds.), *Engagements à travers le monde. Résistances, Conciliations, diffamations. Archives de Jules Humbert-Droz*, IV. *Avec une introduction de Bernhard H. Bayerlein sous le titre: "Résistants' contre Staline, 'conciliateurs' communistes et diffamateurs des libertés contre André Gide"* [Zürich: Chronos, 2001], pp. 253f.).

a Weapon) in which he developed his theory and methodology of anti-Fascist propaganda, which was opposed by the KPD.⁸⁷

The last of Münzenberg's projects, before he was found dead on the run from the German Wehrmacht in France, a project realised outside and against the Communist mainstream, and after his expulsion from the KPD in 1937, was the German-French Paris newspaper *Die Zukunft*.⁸⁸ It was published with the subtitles *A New Germany: a new Europe, Organ of the German-French Union* and *Journal anti-hitlérien*, edited by Münzenberg in Paris. With the young dissident Arthur Koestler, the pacifist Hans Siemsen and the Left-wing Catholic Werner Thormann as editors, it was published from 1938 until the German invasion of France in May 1940 in 81 large-format issues. Known as the "Great European Tribune" in German, and as the "common platform for liberal Socialism", it was one of the most important anti-Fascist media and at the same time the last mediator for unity of the anti-Hitler opposition during the German emigration. Judging by its content, concepts and its design, it was more than just an "exile" organ. In research, perceived more as a marginal phenomenon, partly as a personal quirk of Münzenberg, it differed from the other usually more established institutions of the German exile press as the most ambitious German-French media project with European radiation during the final crisis of the

87 "Kein Volk, dessen nationale Unabhängigkeit und staatlicher Bestand durch die ununterbrochene, unterirdische Wühlarbeit der Hitlerpropaganda bedroht ist, kann gegen eine solche Propaganda passiv bleiben, ebensowenig vermögen es die Massen des unterdrückten deutschen Volkes, die, um in ihrem Kampf für Freiheit und Demokratie vorwärts zu kommen, zunächst die erste und mächtigste Stellung des Gegners, seine organisierte Propaganda, überwinden müssen", Schulz, *Willi Münzenberg*, p. 315.

88 Concerning the "Zukunft" see: Roussel, *Zu Willi Münzenbergs verlegerischer Tätigkeit*; Dieter Schiller, *Der Traum von Hitlers Sturz. Studien zur deutschen Exilliteratur 1933–1945* (Frankfurt am Main-Berlin-Bern: Peter Lang, 2010); Thomas Keller, *Deutsch-französische Dritte-Weg-Diskurse. Personalistische Intellektuellendebatten der Zwischenkriegszeit* (München: Fink, 2001); Ursula Langkau-Alex, "Die Zukunft" der Vergangenheit oder "Die Zukunft" der Zukunft? Zur Bündniskonzeption der Zeitschrift zwischen Oktober 1938 und August 1939", in Hélène Roussel/Lutz Winckler, *Deutsche Exilpresse und Frankreich 1933–1940* (Frankfurt am Main-Berlin-Bern: Peter Lang, 1992), pp. 123–156; Tania Schlie, *Alles für die Einheit. Zur politischen Biographie Willi Münzenbergs. 1935–1940*, MA thesis, University of Hamburg, 1990; Hans-Manfred Bock, *Versöhnung oder Subversion? Deutsch-französische Verständigungs-Organisationen und -Netzwerke der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Tübingen: Narr, 2014, especially Chapter XI about the "German-French Union"); Bernhard H. Bayerlein, "'Die Zukunft' and the 'Franco-German Union', Paris (1938–1940). New Visions of Transnational Anti-Fascism and the Anti-Hitler Resistance at the End of the Interwar Period", *Globkult Magazin. Politik, Gesellschaft, Kultur, Geschichte*, <http://www.globkult.de>, 2016.

inter-war period from the Munich Agreement in September 1938 until the German occupation of France in May 1940. Thus Münzenberg realised in another dimension what had failed under the auspices of the “Popular Front”. It succeeded, at least partially, in stimulating the German and European anti-Hitler oppositions to try to prevent the outbreak of WWII. At the same time, a final European network was achieved which included the defence of human rights as well as the creation of a socialist core of workers in order to achieve the goal of an independent Socialist-Democratic Germany after the fall of Hitler. At the same time, the workers of Europe were to be warned of the consequences of the Hitler-Stalin Pact and protected against the “traitor Stalin”.⁸⁹

Basic structures of the “Cultural International” can once again be re-discovered here together with the concept of a Democratic Socialist and anti-Stalinist unified German Workers’ Party. The network linked to this journal and to an anti-Fascist radio station was to act not only as a movement to unify the anti-Hitler opposition but also as an anti-Fascist and anti-Stalinist think-tank of intellectuals and workers, a modern human rights and humanitarian organisation and pioneer of European and Franco-German ideas. Münzenberg’s greater last-minute objective – to prevent the onset of World War II – did not succeed. Münzenberg himself suffered a violent death trying to flee the Wehrmacht in France, which may have been carried out by either Soviet or KPD agents. Nevertheless, his historical example is indispensable for further research and as a legacy for future transnational solidarity movements.

Breaking with International Solidarity: The Comintern and the Fate of the International Brigades

The history of the International Brigades after their demobilisation in Spain and their subsequent escapes and internments in French camps during the years 1938–1939 is another paradigm of the induced process of the breaking of solidarity and of de-internationalisation “from above”. The shameful treatment of the approximately 35,000 fighters of the Inter-Brigades after the defeat by those who had created them, really is the culmination of a negative spiral primarily as a result of the Soviet intervention in the Spanish Civil War.⁹⁰

89 See the famous article by Willi Münzenberg, “Der Verräter, Stalin, bist Du!”, *Die Zukunft*, 22.9.1939.

90 For more statistics see: Remi Skoutelsky, *Novedad en el Frente. Las Brigadas Internacionales en la Guerra Civil* (Madrid: Temas de hoy, 2006), p. 393.

Despite contrary efforts of a few Comintern and party functionaries, especially from the French Communist Party, the Brigadistas were ultimately abandoned to their fate. The political and organisational opportunities to help them via the unique transnational networks of a global organisation such as the Comintern remained largely unexploited. Starting out as Europe's fighting vanguard against Fascism, the Brigade members were now imprisoned in the French internment camps and were consistently described by Arthur Koestler as being "the scum of the earth".⁹¹

With the argument that the "Internationals" were to be deployed in their individual countries by the Communist parties, the Comintern broke the essential transnational make-up of the brigades. Upon the signing of the Stalin-Hitler pact in August 1939, the Internationals became authentic pariahs and the Soviet Union abandoned both its references to and narratives of internationalist solidarity. By contrast, Münzenberg and the Left Socialists did at least try, not only to ease their fate in France within the existing possibilities (paramilitary work service, Foreign Legion or escape into the "shadow army" or elsewhere), but also established a connection to the French Résistance and to other European resistance movements. The latter were mostly rejected by the Comintern and the Communist parties until the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. The job of the "Zukunft" networks was to furnish humanitarian aid, for example through the Spanish Relief Committees and the Committee for "People in Distress" (*Menschen in Not*).⁹² In 1939, a significant number of the German volunteers in Spain imprisoned in the camp of Gurs in the French Pyrénées became involved in Münzenberg's recently created networks, and not in those of the German CP.

This was not least a part of the global debate about the impact on the International Brigades and their utilisation in WWII. Here, Münzenberg and his friends Edo Fimmen, the General Secretary of the powerful anti-Fascist International Federation of Transport Workers, the Austrian military specialist Julius Deutsch and others stood against André Marty and Georgi Dimitrov, who were acting on Stalin's orders. It is sufficient to look at the cadre files in Moscow containing their "characteristics" in order to understand how the principles of humanity, respect and solidarity with the fighters in the Spanish Civil War were supposedly sacrificed to bureaucratic interests.

91 Koestler's impressive memoirs about his life in the French internment camps was published already in 1941. See: Arthur Koestler, *Scum of the Earth* (London: Left Book Club Edition, 1941).

92 "Menschen in Not", *Die Zukunft*, 25.8.1939.

A scandal within the scandal was the repression and refugee policy of the Soviet Union itself. Their own military instructors and other consultants were mostly killed upon their return or sent to the camps, as were approximately 80% of all German political refugees in the USSR, even many of those who had been granted asylum. The hopes of many fighters in Spain to be granted asylum in the Soviet Union were not fulfilled, despite appropriate proposals and even complaints by high-ranking military leaders in Spain, such as André Marty, Wilhelm Zaisser ("General Gómez") or Manfred Stern ("General Kléber"), while some basic necessities were provided to those who succeeded in reaching the USSR.⁹³ Both before and after the Stalin-Hitler pact, the Soviet Union had even closed its borders, particularly to those who had defended its ideals. Not even a few hundred German fighters of the brigades (of a total of approximately 3,000), who went from the USSR to Spain, were allowed to return.⁹⁴

In the internment camps themselves, there were cases of open "revolts of the International Brigades against the Stalinist policy in Spain" (Broué).⁹⁵ As a collective experience, that of the "Ninth Company" (9ème compagnie) at the internment camp of Gurs stands out, but opposition groups were also found in other camps, e.g. in Le Vernet.⁹⁶ A comparative study of this interesting phenomenon, which was part of the anti-Stalinist shift during the second half of the 1930s, has not yet been undertaken. The context of these disputes exceeds by far the tragic individual dimensions. A particularly intriguing question to be looked at is the political and military contribution of a unique "anti-Fascist army", of experienced fighters during the war in Spain, and thus their potential use as an international core group in the fight against the axis powers in WWII.

93 For Marty's complaint of 26 April, 1940 and his urgent calls see: Pelai Pagès y Blanch, "Marty, Vidal, Kléber et le Komintern. Ce que nous apprennent les archives de Moscou", in Stéfanie Prezioso, Jean Batou, Ami-Jacques Rapin (eds.), *Tant pis si la lutte est cruelle. Volontaires internationaux contre Franco* (Paris: Syllepse, 2008), pp. 85–100.

94 RGASPI, Moskau, 17/3/1026, 99, publ. in *Polithjuro i Komintern*, pp. 787–788. See also: Pelai Pagès y Blanch, "Marty, Vidal, Kléber; Pierre Broué, "Les cadres des Brigades internationales et la politique de l'Internationale communiste", in Prezioso/Batou/Rapin (eds.), *Tant pis si la lutte*, pp. 39–52.

95 Some examples are the "glorious veteran" and British Communist Tom Wintringham, the "Irish Marty" Fred Copeman, and the German Writer and military Gustav Regler.

96 Dieter Nelles, "Die Unabhängige Antifaschistische Gruppe 9. Kompanie im Lager Gurs", in Helga Grebing, Christl Wickert (eds.), *Das "andere Deutschland" im Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Essen: Klartext, 1994), pp. 56–85; cf. Skoutelsky, *Novedad en el Frente*, p. 410.

But here we definitely depart from our present topic of the solidarity networks during the inter-war period.

Some Conclusions

The new mass movements, both against the war and as a consequence of it as well as the Comintern's own political mission, gave birth to a new type of "non party" transnational networks and a new type of social, political and cultural organisations. The interconnected characteristics of these transnational radical networks, under the umbrella of the Comintern, make these a central piece not only of (sub)-political and transcultural global history, but also of the intertwined histories of transnational networks on the one hand and both social and political movements on the edge of social and political history on the other.

Five major fields of analysis are considered in this article. On an initial level, a tentative typological classification of the various groups within these multifaceted umbrella organisations of variable origins, developments and dependencies is provided. This typology, based on sets of articulations, practices and areas of activity, shows the multifold modes of articulations and provides five main groups of organisations and networks. These transnational networks not only display a new style of politics based on mobilisations, campaigns, demonstrations, the use of mass media and a wide range of activities having an impact on society. Willi Münzenberg, in particular, based on his organisational and propaganda concept, and under the aegis of the Internationale Arbeiterhilfe, developed a special transnational and combined model of networks, by the combination at an international level of innovative media (journals, films, artistic expression and politics) and by coupling the issue of alliances (popular front, united front) with propaganda.⁹⁷ This definition provided by Hélène Roussel may be complemented by the great significance given to cultural actors and especially to the role of writers and intellectuals. Without the support of a representative part of the cultural avantgarde of the Interwar period, including independent, sympathising or party intellectuals, writers, architects, film directors, photographers, designers, painters, librarians and art dealers, this intermediate empire of visions and ideas would not have worked. Thus, the cultural avantgrade enabled the construction of a global community and the celebration of international interactions. The return to orthodoxy and antistalinist paradigmatic shift as a reaction is particularly significant in the second half of the 1930s and sealed the fate of these transnational networks.

97 Roussel, "Zu Willi Münzenbergs verlegerischer Tätigkeit", pp. 157, 164ff.

On a second level, a set of definitions is provided in order to allow the placement of these international non-governmental organisations, which gathered millions of people around them, within the fields of global studies and world history. The conceptualisation must pay attention to their hybrid nature as well as to the ambiguous character of the non-governmental organisations which are not completely independent of state institutions, e.g. in the case of the Soviet Union with the Comintern being an intermediary. Although these were not state organisations (as in the case of “cultural diplomacy”), their subsequent disintegration and dissolution in particular clearly show the influence of Soviet policy, which was mediated through the Comintern.

Starting with these multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary and transcultural sets and modes of articulations and practices, the multiple areas of activity of the different organisations and networks show an embedded “solar system of the Comintern” (Otto Kuusinen), a sort of cognitive script the aim of which was to form an “Intermediate Empire” (Karl Schlögel). Part 3 explains in an ideal-typical optic that, by their charisma and symbolic power, these multiple networks covering the globe were anticipating a new and transcendental “Cultural International” to which they were aspiring. Meanwhile, their disruption from within put an end to the construction of such a “dream house of modernity” (in the designation of Walter Benjamin which he used in a concrete, architectural sense).

In order to contextualise and historicise their development and later disruption and dissolution, the interconnected links between these transnational networks and both the Comintern and Soviet politics are crucial. A brief overview of the Comintern’s history, provided in Part 4 of this article, indicates six major stages between 1919 and 1943 – six stages of the Comintern which are then analysed in relation to its “solar system”.

While their origin and development were associated with phases 1 and 2 (1919–1928), the crisis and disintegration of these organisations had already begun during the third phase (1928–1934), mostly as a result of the German catastrophe 1933 which brought the Nazis to power. The consequences were all the more negative as most of the co-ordinating and governing organs of the transnational networks were located in Berlin. During phase 4, the Popular Fronts (1935–1939) and the new defensive strategies of the Communist Movements (1935–1939), as a result of several defeats in the international arena, led to a process of increasing “nationalisation”. During the first period, anti-Fascist organisations particularly were (re-)constructed, but the official Communist movement offered a scenario of de-internationalisation and isolation at a transnational level, accelerated by the Stalinist Terror and linked to Stalin’s war politics, which ultimately led to the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943.

In the final section of this article, the causal connection and historical explanation of this process of degradation, de-internationalisation and liquidation of the "Cultural International" has been scrutinised. As an important part of the transformation of international Communism, this often forgotten process of de-internationalisation under Stalinism is linked to the larger questions of Soviet politics in the 1930s, as a result of the catastrophic events of 1933, not only for Germany but also for the international workers' movement as a whole. In October 1936, the anti-Fascist Popular Front received its first decisive blow. The Comintern's drive for a certain "nationalisation" of the Communist parties was accompanied by the increased restrictions on or even the dissolution of the transnational, anti-Fascist and other networks established by Willi Münzenberg, starting with the Workers International Relief, which would also affect the anti-colonial and cultural networks, mass and sympathetic organisations, committees and exile publishing houses. This confirms the assumption already made by Alexander Nekrich, that the Popular Front policy might have been some sort of withdrawal position or a "plan B" on the part of Stalin's dictatorship in the event of a change in Nazi Germany's foreign policy. Last but not least, the Popular Front was also supposed to prevent Leftist oppositional currents within Communism.⁹⁸

Meanwhile, the documents from within Stalin's immediate sphere of power raise new questions concerning the Soviet Union's anti-Fascism of the 1930s that provided the overarching motivation and justification for most of the activities of its international networks. The Soviet Union's anti-Fascism is a rarely-contested bastion in historiography. Even Stalin's pact with Hitler in 1939 did not completely destroy this myth, because it was deemed to be only a short-term, tactical manoeuvre. Whether the Soviet Union really switched towards a more consistent policy of collective security directed against the expansionist intentions of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, as still a large part of historiography suggests, turns out to be rather doubtful. A hitherto hidden history emerges from the archives, slowly, piece by piece. The Politburo's resolutions in fact do not point towards any definitive change in direction towards the Western democracies or towards a new system of collective security. On the contrary, they show that the Nazi government was largely spared from Soviet criticism. The results of the "archival revolution" allow another far-reaching critical evaluation of anti-Fascism, and the Soviet Union's anti-Fascist claim during the entire 1930s has to be reviewed. Here it is up to historiography to set a new course.

98 Shubin, *Mir*, pp. 209ff.

From the outside, Stalin appeared to many as the most convincing opponent of Hitler. However, the aims of Soviet politics were different. Especially within Stalinism, nothing was as it seemed. Historians occasionally speak of “duality” or “pendulum politics” and diplomatic games. Moscow is said to have been “observing” the situation and preferred to maintain a balance between the different forces in Europe (Oleg Khlevniuk).⁹⁹ However, there are many hints that since Hitler’s acquisition of power – from maybe even as early as mid-1932 – Stalin was striving to attain a *modus vivendi* with first the ultra-conservative and then Nazi Germany, which was to be of a different quality compared to the German-Soviet relations during the 1920s. It is now being seriously contended, and with future research may yet prove to be conclusive, that throughout the entire 1930s Stalin had in fact been hoping for an alliance with Hitler’s Germany, a goal he achieved in 1939.¹⁰⁰ Instead of denouncing the National Socialist terror against German Communists, until 1934 Soviet politics were aimed against Social Democracy (slandered as being “Social Fascism”). Even the Comintern was brought into line with this policy and one of the preparatory measures was the liquidation of its “solar system”, the fledgling “Cultural International”. New documents show how thoroughly anti-Fascism was erased by both the Soviet Union and the Comintern under the conditions of the Stalin-Hitler Non-Aggression and Friendship Pacts of August and September 1939.¹⁰¹ According to these pacts, the Communist parties, forced into line, had to regard the USSR and the German Reich jointly as the camp of World Peace.

Judging from the assumptions made in this article, the anti-Fascist networks, especially those of the “Münzenberg type”, appear in a new light. Although they are not necessarily to be regarded as displaying a directly oppositional agenda, it now becomes clearer that these anti-Fascist networks often had to be enforced and implemented against the prevailing general line and also against the “hidden line”. Their origin and activity are therefore to be valued

99 Oleg Khlevniuk, “1930–1933 gg.”, in Grant Adibekov (ed.), *Politbiuro sk RKP(b)-VKP(b) i Evropa*, pp. 209–215.

100 See: Bernhard H. Bayerlein, “Abschied von einem Mythos. Die UdSSR, die Komintern und der Antifaschismus 1930–1941”, *Osteuropa* 59:7/8 (2009), pp. 125–148.

101 Bernhard H. Bayerlein, “Der Verräter, Stalin, bist Du!”. *Vom Ende der internationalen Solidarität. Komintern und kommunistische Parteien im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1941*. Unter Mitarbeit von Natal’ja Lebedeva, Michail Narinskij und Gleb Albert. Mit einem Zeitzeugenbericht von Wolfgang Leonhard. Vorwort von Hermann Weber (Berlin: Aufbau, 2008).

even more highly. The construction of this Intermediate International should be afforded far more respect. Under difficult conditions, on a much smaller scale and in fierce opposition to the Communist orthodoxy, Münzenberg's much smaller "last empire" was founded in 1938 and based on the weekly *Die Zukunft* in Paris. This last-ditch attempt to inspire a collective answer to the end of overarching Left-wing solidarity was finally disrupted in June 1940 with both the German occupation of France and Münzenberg's untimely and still as yet largely unsolved mysterious death later in the same month when the remnant of his body was found in a small Savoyan grove on the verge of a road in German-occupied France.

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The USSR Section of the International Red Aid (MOPR): The Institutionalisation of International Solidarity in Interwar Soviet Society

Gleb J. Albert

Introduction

“Mass voluntary societies” (*massovye dobrovol'nye obshchestva*) were a distinctive phenomenon of Soviet society, beginning with the era of its New Economic Policy (NEP). Endorsed by the party and centred on single issues, they were supposed to pull non-party members into Communist politics and to contribute to several aspects of Soviet state building which could not be solved by the party alone. For the Bolsheviks, these organisations were useful since they could both mobilise those who were sympathetic towards just individual aspects of the party programme and channel genuine enthusiasm into particular issues. Furthermore, while creating “counterfeit spontaneity” (Peter Kenez), these organisations were a means of fighting disorderly activity and the genuine spontaneity (*stikhiinost'*) so much feared by the party leadership.¹

These organisations were supposed to form an integral part of a future “Soviet public sphere” (“*sovetskaia obshchestvennost'*”). The concept of *obshchestvennost'*, which used to identify (potentially critical) social activism in pre-revolutionary Russian society and the feeling of belonging that grew out of it, was picked up by the Bolsheviks in order to nurture and channel social activism outside the ranks of the party, without losing the party's firm grip on it.²

- 1 T.H. Rigby, *Communist Party Membership in the U.S.S.R., 1917–1967* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 454ff.; Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State. Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917–1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 153ff., 254; Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens. The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 63ff.; Natal'ia V. Kiseleva, “Dobrovol'nye obshchestva v Sovetskoi Rossii. 1917 – konets 1920-kh gg.” (dokt. diss., Rostovskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1998); Irina N. Il'ina, *Obshchestvennye organizatsii Rossii v 1920-e gody* (Moskva: IRI RAN, 2000).
- 2 On the concept of *obshchestvennost'*, see Catriona Kelly and Vadim Volkov, “Obshchestvennost', Sobornost'. Collective Identities”, in *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution, 1881–1940*, ed. Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 26–27; Michael David-Fox, “From Illusory “Society” to Intellectual “Public”. VOKS,

While pre-revolutionary *obshchestvennost'* carried within itself the nucleus of what would later become known as "civil society", the "mass voluntary societies", with their centralisation and uniformity, constituted "a mock civil society at best".³ Nevertheless, they are a crucial object of study, in order to find out how, on the one hand, the Bolshevik leadership imagined social activism in a party-led Communist society, and, on the other hand, what real possibilities of social activism there might actually have been.

While several Soviet "mass voluntary societies" during the period of the NEP have been the subject of several thorough studies,⁴ one of them remains forgotten: the Soviet section of the International Red Aid (IRA), known in the USSR as the MOPR (*Mezhdunarodnaia organizatsiia pomoshchi bortsam revoliutsii*, "International Organisation to Help the Fighters of the Revolution").⁵ After the opening of the Soviet archives in the early 1990s, no study in the West has dealt with the MOPR's history and, even in post-perestroika Russia, only a few local studies have been dedicated to the organisation's activities in the provinces.⁶

International Travel and Party-Intelligentsia Relations in the Interwar Period", *Contemporary European History* 11:1 (2002), pp. 11–12; Matthias Neumann, "Between Party and People. The Communist Youth League and the Construction of Soviet Obshchestvennost' 1917–1932 (Paper presented at the XXXVIII Conference of the Study Group on the Russian Revolution, Glasgow, UK, 7.1 2012), pp. 1–5.

3 Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, p. 67.

4 Several case studies on individual "mass societies" have appeared, especially in the decades after the "archival revolution": William Odom, *The Soviet Volunteers. Modernization and Bureaucracy in a Public Mass Organization* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974); Peris, *Storming the Heavens*; Sandra Dahlke, "An der antireligiösen Front". *Der Verband der Gottlosen in der Sowjetunion der zwanziger Jahre* (Hamburg: Kovač, 1998); Ol'ga Iu. Nikonova, *Vospitanie patriotov. Osoaviakhim i voennaia podgotovka naseleniia v ural'skoi provintsii. 1927–1941 gg.* (Moskva: Novyi khronograf, 2010); Ulf Brunnbauer, "'The League of Time' (Liga Vremia): Problems of Making a Soviet Working Class in the 1920s", *Russian History* 27:1–4 (2000), pp. 461–495.

5 Further on in this paper, I will be using the Soviet acronym "MOPR" to denominate the Soviet section, even though in the Soviet Union, the whole international organisation was known as MOPR.

6 B.P. Shiferson, "Leningradskaia organizatsiia Mezhdunarodnoi organizatsii pomoshchi bortsam revoliutsii (MOPR). Kratkaia istoriia i obzor istochnikov", in *Dobrovol'nye obshchestva v Petrograde-Leningrade v 1917–1937 gg.*, ed. Anzhelina P. Kupaigorodskaia and Natal'ia B. Lebina (Leningrad: Nauka, 1989), pp. 57–64; N.N. Pavlikov, "Sozдание i deiatel'nost' Kaluzhskogo otdeleniia MOPR v 1920-e gody. Pomoshch' uznikam zarubezh'ia" (Kand. diss., Rossiiskii universitet druzhby narodov, 1994); Vera Zmeeva, "Istoriia Viatskogo MOPRa, ili Zacharovannye revoliutsiei", in *Chelovek v istorii. Rossiia – XX vek. Vserossiiskii konkurs istoricheskikh issledovatel'skikh rabot starsheklassnikov. Sbornik rabot pobeditelei. Konkurs 2000–2001* (Moskva: Memorial, 2002), pp. 127–142; Aleksandr Iu. Saran, *Vlast' i obshchestvennye organizatsii*

A contextualisation of this organisation, and particularly an analysis of the relations between the MOPR and the Russian Communist Party (RKP(b)/VKP(b)),⁷ are still lacking⁸ – something that the vast Soviet scholarship on the MOPR was neither willing nor able to do, even though it provided useful facts and sources on the overt activity of this organisation.⁹ The MOPR has fallen into oblivion in Western scholarship to such an extent that a recent article on Soviet youth explained the acronym “MOPR” as being “the symbol of Komsomol”.¹⁰ Such a disregard for the MOPR in the historiography is unjustified – not only because it was larger than any other “voluntary society” in the Soviet Union, encompassing 8 million members in 1930,¹¹ but also because it set itself the goal of promoting international solidarity and was thus much more “political” than other comparable Soviet organisations.

Tsentral'noi Rossii, 1928–1934 gg. (Moskva-Orel: OGAU, 2003), pp. 192–198; Aleksei A. Gordin, “Formirovanie predstavlenii sovetskikh rabochikh 30-kh godov o obshchestvenno-politicheskoi zhizni na Zapade. Na materialakh Gor'kovskogo avtozavoda” (kand. diss., Nizhegorodskii Gosudarsvennyi arkhitekturno-stroitel'nyi universitet, 2004), 96–110; O.M. Kostiuikova, “Diial'nist' Mizhnarodnoi orhanizatsii dopomohy bortsiam revoliutsii v Ukraïni v 20-kh rr. xx st.”, *Visnyk Cherkas'koho universytetu* 160/161 (2009), pp. 141–146.

7 In 1925, the Russian Communist Party was re-named the All-Union Communist Party (Vsesoiuznaia kommunisticheskaia partiia (bol'sheviki), VKP(b)).

8 With the exception of: Il'ina, *Obshchestvennye organizatsii Rossii v 1920-e gody*, pp. 135–136; Kiseleva, “Dobrovol'nye obshchestva v Sovetskoï Rossii”, pp. 570–597.

9 The main Soviet works on the MOPR are: Leonid G. Babichenko, “Pervyi etap deiatel'nosti MOPRa”, *Voprosy istorii* 10 (1970), pp. 212–215; Aleksandr Ia. Pankratov, *Vernost' internatsionalizmu* (Gor'kii: Volgo-Viatskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1970); R.I. Pikovskaia, “Deiatel'nost' sovetskoï sektsii MOPR v 1922–1933 gg.” (Avtoreferat kand. diss., Moskovskii gosudarstvennyi istoriko-arkhivnyi institut, 1970); Iurii A. L'vunin, *Bor'ba Kommunisticheskoi partii za ukreplenie internatsional'nykh svyazei rabocheho klassa SSSR. 1924–1928 gg.* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1975), pp. 159–185; Anatolii I. Avrus, *MOPR v bor'be protiv terrora i fashizma 1922–1939* (Saratov: Izdatel'stvo Saratovskogo universiteta, 1976); Evgenii A. Mel'nikov, *V edinom stroiu internatsionalistov. Iz istorii sovetskikh sektsii mezhdunarodnykh organizatsii rabocheho klassa, 1919–1939 gg.* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo universiteta, 1982). A contemporary overview of Soviet scholarship on the MOPR is provided in A.N. Vasil'eva, “MOPR v noveishei istoricheskoi literature”, *Voprosy istorii* 5 (1975), pp. 140–146. Many Soviet regional studies on the MOPR are listed in Carola Tischler, “Die Internationale Rote Hilfe. Eine Literaturübersicht”, *The International Newsletter of Historical Studies on Comintern, Communism and Stalinism* 1:3/4 (1993/94), pp. 121–126.

10 Isabel Tirado, “Peasants into Soviets. Reconstructing Komsomol Identity in the Russian Countryside of the 1920s”, *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 18 (2001), p. 50.

11 Il'ina, *Obshchestvennye organizatsii Rossii v 1920-e gody*, p. 112.

In the following article, I will attempt to close this historiographical gap by presenting a brief history of the Soviet Union's largest inter-war "mass society". Besides re-assembling the known facts surrounding the foundation of the MOPR, this paper will place a special focus on the role of the MOPR within Soviet power structures, in particular its troubled inter-relations with the Communist Party. After providing an overview of the MOPR's activities, through which it attempted to involve its members in international solidarity, this paper will approach the composition and motivation of the MOPR's active members and functionaries, as well as take a look at its rank-and-file members. Two further essential questions will also be addressed: how far this organisation, with its internationalist agenda, succeeded in embedding itself into Soviet society and becoming part of a new Soviet public sphere; and which transformations had to be made to the idea of "internationalism" after the onset of Stalinism and its nationalised agenda.

The International Red Aid and Its Soviet Section

In September 1922, a group of Polish Communist veterans, led by Julian Marchlewski, at the "Society of Old Bolsheviks" and at the "Society of Former Political Prisoners and Exiles", came up with the idea of founding an "international political Red Cross", an international relief organisation for imprisoned revolutionaries abroad.¹² Their plans were submitted to the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (TsK RKP(b)) and, at the 4th World Congress of the Comintern in December 1922, the International Red Aid (IRA) was founded.¹³ This idea stemmed from pre-revolutionary traditions – committees

12 For revolutionary veteran societies in the early Soviet Union, see Marc Junge, *Die Gesellschaft ehemaliger politischer Zwangsarbeiter und Verbannter in der Sowjetunion. Gründung, Entwicklung und Liquidierung, 1921–1935* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2009); Sandra Pujals, "Fathers and Sons. The Politics and Culture of Generational Class War in Revolutionary Russia. 1918–1935", *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 32:2–3 (2005), pp. 209–232.

13 Babichenko, "Pervyi etap deiatel'nosti MOPRa", 212–213; Avrus, *MOPR v bor'be*, 37–45; Kurt Schilde, "Es lebe die Internationale Rote Hilfe! Die weltweite 'Wohlfahrtsorganisation' der kommunistischen Parteien", in Sabine Hering and Kurt Schilde (eds.), *Die Rote Hilfe. Die Geschichte der internationalen kommunistischen "Wohlfahrtsorganisation" und ihrer sozialen Aktivitäten in Deutschland. 1921–1941* (Opladen: Verlag Leske + Budich, 2003), pp. 57–71; *Thesen und Resolutionen des IV. Weltkongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale. Moskau, vom 5. November bis 5. Dezember 1922* (Hamburg: Verlag der Kommunistischen Internationale, 1923), p. 111.

to help political prisoners had already been organised by exiled Russian revolutionaries –,¹⁴ but had also picked up practices in the West where, for example, the Communist Party of Germany had already founded its own “Red Aid” (Rote Hilfe Deutschlands, RHD) in April 1921.¹⁵

The IRA was one of the Comintern’s many “international mass organisations for special purposes” which were set up to reach out beyond the Communist parties’ borders and thereby mobilise parts of Western society for particular goals.¹⁶ Considering the international situation of the Communist movement, with the era of European revolutions coming to an end and many radical activists being held captive under inhumane conditions, the foundation of the IRA was indeed very timely, which explains why the RKP(b) and the Comintern picked up on and approved this initiative so eagerly. With its help, the diverse prisoner relief initiatives of the national parties could remain centralised under the auspices of the Comintern. Furthermore, by portraying itself as being an independent organisation encompassing the whole spectrum of the political Left (and providing relief to both Communist and non-Communist radicals alike), important public figures could be mobilised who would otherwise have shunned a purely Communist organisation. Consequently, in many countries, under the auspices of the respective Communist parties, the IRA developed active sections, particularly in countries with a strong Communist movement, such as Germany (where prominent intellectuals like Albert Einstein and Heinrich Mann could be mobilised for its support), and Poland, but also in countries like the USA and Spain.¹⁷ In 1926, the IRA could pride itself on having

14 Anina Gidkov, “Das Exil als Lebenswelt. Prägungen einer Generation von Revolutionären”, in Heiko Haumann (ed.), *Die Russische Revolution 1917* (Köln: Böhlau, 2007), pp. 54–55.

15 Nikolaus Brauns, *Schafft Rote Hilfe! Geschichte und Aktivitäten der proletarischen Hilfsorganisation für politische Gefangene in Deutschland. 1919–1938* (Bonn: Pahl-Rugenstein, 2003).

16 Serge Wolikow, *L’Internationale Communiste, 1919–1943. Le Komintern ou le rêve déchu du parti mondial de la révolution* (Ivry-sur-Seine: Éd. de l’Atelier, Éd. Ouvrières, 2010), pp. 38–39; Bernhard H. Bayerlein, “Das neue Babylon. Strukturen und Netzwerke der Kommunistischen Internationale und ihre Klassifizierung”, *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (2004), 230–235. Also see Chapter 1 of this volume.

17 Sabine Hering and Kurt Schilde (eds.), *Die Rote Hilfe. Die Geschichte der internationalen kommunistischen “Wohlfahrtsorganisation” und ihrer sozialen Aktivitäten in Deutschland. 1921–1941* (Opladen: Verlag Leske + Budich, 2003); Randi Storch, *Red Chicago. American Communism at Its Grassroots, 1928–35* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Laura Branciforte, *El Socorro Rojo en España, 1923–1939. Relatos de la solidaridad antifascista* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2011).

36 national sections. By 1933 it had 71 national sections, of which only a small minority were able to operate legally.¹⁸

The Soviet section of the IRA, however, is a case *sui generis*. First of all, it did not only provide the bulk of the IRA's worldwide membership, but also most of its finances – through the money collected and donated by Soviet members. None of the IRA's national sections were particularly successful at self-sustainability.¹⁹ Within the IRA, the Soviet section had a special role as the “rearguard of world revolution” from the beginning²⁰ – which becomes evident from the fact that, before 1925, an official Soviet section did not even exist, but instead its work within the USSR was carried out by the Executive Committee of the IRA.²¹

Apart from these organisational peculiarities, the MOPR functioned within a completely different setting than its sister organisations in the West: that of the Soviet *obshchestvennost'*. But also within the array of Soviet “mass societies”, the MOPR was a special case – one reason being that, unlike other such organisations, it was almost completely self-sustained.²² Other organisations were focussed on tasks related to aspects of state-building, such as civil defence (Osoavikhim)²³ or Taylorist work methods (the “Time League”).²⁴ The MOPR, on the other hand, was working in a completely different topical landscape – its main concern was a traditional ideological and practical element of the workers' movement and, moreover, of the Communist party itself. The MOPR provided institutional form to international solidarity and practiced Internationalism – a core element of the labour movement's ideology and action.²⁵ Internationalism was not only “deeply ingrained in the mental

18 Schilde, “Es lebe die Internationale Rote Hilfe!” 61; J. Martin Ryle, “International Red Aid and Comintern Strategy, 1922–1926”, *International Review of Social History* 15:1 (1970), pp. 43–68; Il'ina, *Obshchestvennye organizatsii Rossii v 1920-e gody*, pp. 135–136.

19 Schilde, “Es lebe die Internationale Rote Hilfe!” pp. 62–63.

20 See the foundation document in: *10 let MOPR v rezoliutsiiakh i dokumentakh* (Moskva: Izdanie TsK MOPR, 1932), p. 8.

21 Protocol of the IRA commission to re-organise its work in the USSR, 31.12.1924, Russian State Archive of Social and Political History, Moscow (in the following: RGASPI), 539/2/73, 36–38; Il'ina (*Obshchestvennye organizatsii Rossii v 1920-e gody*, p. 135) wrongly assumes that a Soviet section had been existent since 1923.

22 Kiseleva, “Dobrovol'nye obshchestva”, p. 626.

23 Odom, *The Soviet Volunteers*; Nikonova, *Vospitanie patriotov*.

24 Brunnbauer, “The League of Time” (Liga Vremia’).

25 The literature on internationalism and the labour movement is too vast to be listed here. For a concise introduction, see; Eric J. Hobsbawm, “Working-Class Internationalism”, in Frits van Holthoon and Marcel van der Linden (eds.), *Internationalism in the Labour*

framework” of the Bolshevik leaders,²⁶ but was also just as important for regional and local “functionary-enthusiasts”²⁷ and for many active rank-and-file members. It was their belief in world revolution and in the transnational connections of class struggle that provided many Communists with their motivation during Revolution and Civil War.²⁸

Thus, while laying internationalism in the hands of a formally non-party “mass society”, the party was not only placing a concern of the labour movement into the hands of wide strata of the populace, but also “outsourcing” one of the most crucial elements of its own ideology and political practice. This, of course, could not be without effect in the institutional relations between the party and the MOPR. This institutional conflict, which will be described later, is to be seen against the backdrop of two larger developments in Soviet politics and ideology. First of all, it is the struggle over Stalin’s ideological line of “Socialism in one country” from 1925 on, which had resulted in both the decline of the importance of internationalism generally and in its replacement by autarkic and nationalist points of reference.²⁹ Secondly, an important change in Soviet discourses and practices of international solidarity had occurred even earlier, namely in 1923/24, in the wake of the abortive “German October”, when the Bolshevik leadership, both expecting and preparing for a revolution in Germany in late 1923, had mobilised enthusiasm and solidarity

Movement, 1830–1940 (Leiden–New York: Brill, 1988), pp. 3–16; Marcel van der Linden, “Proletarian Internationalism. A Long View and Some Speculations”, in Immanuel Wallerstein (ed.), *The Modern World-System in the Longue Durée* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2004), pp. 107–132. For an elaborated view on international solidarity, see the Introduction of this volume.

- 26 Peter Kenez, *A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 31.
- 27 This term is used by Boris Kolonitskii to describe “a distinct social group, the members of which were formally linked with the regime, and who felt a personal tie with it” – be it within or outside the party, who were not merely interested in power but were also loyal and enthusiastic followers of the movement (Boris I. Kolonitskii, “‘Revolutionary Names’. Russian Personal Names and Political Consciousness in the 1920s and 1930s”, *Revolutionary Russia* 6:2 [1993], p. 219).
- 28 Gleb J. Albert, “Activist Subjectivities and the Charisma of World Revolution: Soviet Communists Encounter Revolutionary Germany, 1918–19”, in Klaus Weinhauer, Anthony McElligott, and Kirsten Heinsohn (eds.), *Germany 1916–23. A Revolution in Context*, (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), pp. 181–203.
- 29 Jeffrey Brooks, “Official Xenophobia and Popular Cosmopolitanism in Early Soviet Russia”, *American Historical Review* 12 (1992), pp. 1431–1448; David Brandenberger, “Proletarian Internationalism, ‘Soviet Patriotism’ and the Rise of Russocentric Etatism During the Stalinist 1930s”, *Left History* 6:2 (2000), pp. 80–100.

throughout the Soviet Union for the German proletariat.³⁰ When it became clear that the German revolution was not going to happen, the focus in Soviet agitprop shifted from revolutionary class struggle in Germany towards the victims of “fascism and reaction”, and internationalist practices became less aimed towards militant class solidarity and more concentrated on fund-raising and relief efforts.³¹ This was the changing landscape against which the MOPR had to plan, formulate and develop its ideas and activities.

Soon after the MOPR's foundation at the Comintern's 4th World Congress in December 1922, the party's Central Committee (TsK) issued a circular advising all party organisations throughout the country to provide assistance in founding MOPR cells and recruiting members.³² Since the MOPR was aimed at the “non-party masses”, party members were encouraged just to “set a good example” but, in fact, MOPR cells were tightly linked to party structures. The MOPR had the same “democratic-centralist” organisational structure as the Party itself: a Central Bureau (from 1925 on: Central Committee, TsK MOPR) in Moscow oversaw committees on a provincial (*guberniia*) level, which in turn oversaw *uezd*-committees, and so on, down to the village and factory cells.³³ The Central Committee issued a bi-weekly pictorial newspaper for the wider public as well as a bi-weekly bulletin and a bi-monthly “serious” journal for the activists.³⁴ The regional committees also issued their own publications, even though the Central Committee tried to restrict these activities in order to ensure centralised control over the content.³⁵

As for personnel, the MOPR's self-evaluation on the eve of the 1st All-Union Congress of the organisation (15–18 May, 1925) showed that 72.2 per cent of the

30 Bernhard H. Bayerlein, “The Abortive ‘German October’ 1923. New Light on the Revolutionary Plans of the Russian Communist Party, the Comintern and the German Communist Party”, in Kevin McDermott and John Morison (eds.), *Politics and Society Under the Bolsheviks. Selected Papers From the Fifth World Congress for Central and East European Studies* (Warsaw 1995) (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 251–262; Leonid G. Babichenko, “Politbiuro TsK RKP(b), Komintern i sobytiia v Germanii v 1923 g. Novye arkhivnye materialy”, *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia* 2 (1994), pp. 125–157.

31 Gleb J. Albert, “‘German October Is Approaching’. Internationalism, Activists, and the Soviet State in 1923”, *Revolutionary Russia* 2 (2011), pp. 111–142.

32 “O sodeistvii mezhdunarodnoi organisatsii pomoshchi bortsam revoliutsii” (9 January 1923), *Izvestiia TsK RKP(b)* 2:50 (1923), p. 97.

33 “Pervaia Vsesoiuznaia Konferentsiia MOPR’a”, *Biulleten’ TsK MOPR* 5–6 (1924), pp. 1–2; Kiseleva, “Dobrovol’nye obshchestva”, p. 570.

34 On the MOPR press activities see: R.I. Pikovskaia, “Izdatel’skaia deiatel’nost’ sovetskoi sektiis MOPR”, *Trudy Moskovskogo gosudarstvennogo istoriko-arkhivnogo instituta* 28 (1970), pp. 231–249.

35 “Tsirkuliar N° 24”, *Biulleten’ TsK MOPR* 19 (1924), p. 8.

organisation's cadres at the *guberniia* and *oblast'* levels were party members.³⁶ This is not surprising considering that internationalism was a primary concern of the party, and also considering the practice of the party controlling "mass societies" through "party factions" within the leadership.³⁷ However, already at this point, the MOPR was able to gain impressive membership figures that hint at its "mass" character: By 1 January, 1925, the organisation had 3,499,224 members in 32,188 cells all over the Soviet Union – even though nearly 60 per cent of the members were located within the RSFSR, and with 435,000 in Moscow alone. In October 1925, there were already 5,057,261 members in 42,955 cells.³⁸ At the same time, the party had 772,040 members throughout the Soviet Union.³⁹

These figures, however, have to be accepted with caution, both on the basis of a general mistrust towards Soviet statistics and because the sources often contradict each other.⁴⁰ Moreover, in its first years, the MOPR largely practised collective membership, i.e. whole party cells, factory departments or peasant collectives were co-opted into the organisation, usually after an MOPR representative had given a speech and proposed a resolution calling on all listeners to join which was most often passed "unanimously".⁴¹ Such co-optation did not, of course, always entail consent from the new "members", and the MOPR sometimes had to deal with complaints. In early 1925, the Central Committee issued new instructions, urging a switch from the "broadening" to a "deepening" of the MOPR membership, which would involve a gradual abolition of collective membership,⁴² although this phenomenon remained wide-spread well into the 1930s.⁴³

36 Calculated using questionnaires at the State Archives of the Russian Federation, Moscow (in the following: GARF), 8265/1/3.

37 Kiseleva, "Dobrovol'nye obshchestva v Sovetskoi Rossii", p. 597.

38 M.A. Kushner, ed., *Materialy po MOPR. Spravochnaia kniga dlia otdelenii, iacheek i aktivnykh rabotnikov MOPR'a* (Moskva: Izdanie I.K. MOPR, 1925), p. 156; Otchet o rabote Moskovskogo Komiteta MOPR'a za 9 mesiatsev (s 23 Iiunia 1924 g. po 4 Aprelia 1925 g.), 4.4.1925, GARF, 8265/1/1, 19–25; A. Babaeva, "MOPR v tsifrakh", *Biulleten' TsK MOPR* 23–24 (1925), p. 4. The latter source gives a slightly higher membership number for January 1925.

39 Helmut Altrichter, *Die Sowjetunion von der Oktoberrevolution bis Stalins Tod*, vol. 1 (München: dtv, 1986), p. 342.

40 Kiseleva, "Dobrovol'nye obshchestva v Sovetskoi Rossii", p. 548.

41 Ibid., pp. 537–538.

42 "O chlenstve", *Biulleten' TsK MOPR* 3 (1925), p. 3.

43 As observed by the German communist Max Hoelz in 1930, see Ulla Plener (ed.), *Max Hoelz. "Ich grüße und küsse Dich – Rot Front!" Tagebücher und Briefe. Moskau 1929 bis 1933* (Berlin: Dietz, 2005), p. 123. Also see Saran, *Vlast' i obshchestvennye organizatsii Tsentral'noi Rossii*, p. 193.

Fields of Activity

As a self-proclaimed “political Red Cross”, the MOPR (and the IRA as a whole) struggled to find a balance between charity and revolutionary solidarity. These discussions were present within the leadership throughout the MOPR’s early history. At a meeting of Soviet participants at the Extended Plenum of the IRA held on 18 June, 1924, several crucial questions were raised which we will look at in more detail later on. A heated debate also ensued at this meeting over the tasks that the MOPR was to set itself. The main question, as Panteleimon Lepeshinskii, veteran revolutionary and the first Chairman of the Soviet MOPR, put it, was whether the MOPR was “a political organisation or just a philanthropic one”.⁴⁴ Under the false impression that the already-waning mass enthusiasm for a German revolution would be long-lasting, several provincial representatives in the autumn of 1923 were inclined to think that the MOPR should be used as a political organisation to promote internationalism and to mobilise the masses. As Georgii Permiakov from Tula put it: “The broader aim of the MOPR is the preparation of the Russian workers and peasants for the final struggle, and not these five-kopecks that we are sending [to Western prisoners]”.⁴⁵ While other participants reprimanded him, pointing out that charity for political prisoners was also a revolutionary practice, and that the “masses” became internationalist through the “five-kopeck” fund-raising and not the other way around,⁴⁶ both Permiakov’s and the interventions of other attendees show that regional party activists had high expectations of the new internationalist organisation.⁴⁷

One of the most important fields of activity for the MOPR in the years to come was, however, exactly this collecting of the “five-kopecks” that Permiakov deemed to be secondary. Already during the years 1923–1924, the MOPR’s collections amounted to 2,433,608 gold roubles⁴⁸ – a fact that was celebrated in the MOPR’s self-perception (see Figure 2.1). This money mostly came from membership fees which were set extraordinarily low in order to attract large membership numbers.⁴⁹ Also, the MOPR cells were supposed to raise money

44 Protokol soveshchaniia uchastnikov rasshirennogo plenuma TsK MOPR’a, 18.6.1924, RGASPI, 539/2/3, 33–38, here 35.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 350b–36.

47 Permiakov had taken a similar position at the First All-Union conference of the MOPR in January 1924, see *Pervaia vsesoiuznaia konferentsiia MOPR’a. 30–31 ianvaria 1924. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moskva: Izdanie TsK MOPR, 1924), pp. 58–59.

48 Kushner, *Materialy po MOPR*, p. 155.

49 Osnovnye dostizheniia MOPR v SSSR za tri goda ego deiatel’nosti [1926], GARF, 8265/3/3, 1–10, here 50b.



FIGURE 2.1 *Monetary donations for the MOPR in the USSR [1923–1925], Photograph of an exhibition poster, approx. 1925*

SOURCE: RGASPI 539/5/804, 9.

by selling brochures to both members and the interested public. This plan of action, however, entailed a problem. Even though the membership fees were very low, the MOPR cells often did not have enough authority or willpower to make sure the fees were paid in time, so that when they ordered literature from the centre, they were not always able to pay for it and thus ran into

debt.⁵⁰ This problem was so acute that the MOPR had to conduct a special campaign in mid-1925 under the slogan “Not one kopeck of debt for the prisoners of capitalism”.⁵¹ Another way of collecting membership fees, especially during the early period of mass collective membership, was deducting them directly from members’ wages, which obviously caused discontent among the co-opted membership.⁵² The MOPR leadership spoke out sharply against such methods,⁵³ but it seems that this practice nonetheless continued to be utilised, since it was the most secure and least work-intensive way for the local cadres to get members to pay their fees.

Apart from this, there were other ways of fund-raising. For example, several more creative regional MOPR organisations launched lotteries in favour of Western prisoners.⁵⁴ These lotteries were an ideologically controversial matter, because they represented a tradition of bourgeois charity from which the MOPR explicitly wanted to distance itself. However, these methods seem to have worked well and generated some revenue in the provinces until finally being banned in 1927.⁵⁵ Still, lotteries were not as controversial as what was negatively characterised by the MOPR leadership as being “commercial deviation” (*kommercheskii* or *khoziaistvennyi uklon*), when, under the conditions of NEP, several regional MOPR organisations attempted to run commercial enterprises, such as restaurants or cinemas. Such undertakings tended to turn into financial disasters due to mismanagement or illegal manipulations.⁵⁶

The most common way to generate revenue besides membership fees, however, was the age-old tradition of conventional charity – the collection box. Collections were organised either on 18 March, the Day of the Paris Commune, which had been a non-working holiday in the Soviet Union since 1922 and was

50 In the region of Khar’kov alone, 140 MOPR cells were deep in debt, see “Denezhnyi otchet Khar’kovskogo Gubernskogo Otdeleniia ‘MOPRa’ za iun’-sentiabr’ mesiatsy 1924 g,” *Biulleten’ Khar’kovskogo gubernskogo komiteta MOPR* 1 (1924), pp. 6–7.

51 Plan raboty TsK MOPR SSSR v oblasti organizatsionno-instruktorskoi na iun’ – sentiabr’ 1925 g., [May 1925], GARF, 8265/1/1, 70–75. The problem of getting members to pay their fees was also acute in other “mass societies”. See Nikonova, *Vospitanie patriotov*, p. 390.

52 Pavlikov, *Sozdanie i dejatel’nost’*, pp. 109–110.

53 “Kak otnestis’ k otrabotke i otchisleniiam v pol’zu MOPR”, *Biulleten’ TsK MOPR* 1–2 (1925), p. 5.

54 L’vunin, *Bor’ba Kommunisticheskoi partii za ukreplenie*, pp. 167–168.

55 Kiseleva, “Dobrovol’nye obshchestva v Sovetskoi Rossii”, pp. 618–620. The MOPR leadership tried to outlaw lotteries already as early as 1924, see Kushner, *Materialy po MOPR*, p. 109.

56 Mestnyi, “O khoziaistvennom uklone”, *Biulleten’ TsK MOPR* 9–10 (1925), pp. 6–7.

to be declared "MOPR Day" in 1923,⁵⁷ or attached to special campaigns connected to events in the West, such as the British general strike of 1926, the trials of Sacco and Vanzetti throughout the 1920s, or the infamous trial of the "Scottsboro boys".⁵⁸ Another rather traditionalist source of income for the local MOPR branches were badges, which they sold both to its members and to the general populace. These seem to have been rather popular and even constituted the main source of income for some branches.⁵⁹

Campaigns were usually initiated "from above" and corresponded with current party and Comintern policies. However, the possibility for initiatives to come "from below" was not completely absent. In May 1924, for example, a rank-and-file party member, stirred up by the press coverage of Fascist atrocities in Italy, wrote to Lev Trotsky and asked whether it was possible to initiate a fund-raising campaign for the victims. Trotsky, after having corresponded with a few Italian Communists and having consulted the Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Georgii Chicherin, about possible diplomatic implications, wrote to the MOPR and suggested initiating such a campaign.⁶⁰ Even though a large-scale campaign on this issue did not eventually get off the ground (probably due to the fading of Trotsky's own star), it is remarkable that any such initiative "from below" had apparently been taken quite seriously.

It proved rather difficult, however, to get fee-paying members involved in more active work and to turn them into "*aktiv*" cadres of the MOPR. The party leadership advised the MOPR to involve more non-party workers and peasants, but these calls went mostly unanswered.⁶¹ The really active work on the spot

57 Protocol N° 6 of the Session of the Central Buro of the IRA, 12.1.1923, RGASPI, 539/2/2, 3–4: Through its bloody repression, the Paris Commune and its myth was an important part of the MOPR's self-image. See e.g.: Ja. Mutsenek, *Parizhskaia kommuna i MOPR*, 2nd ed. (Ekaterinoslav: Izdanie TsK MOPR USSR, 1926).

58 Protocol of the Session of the Secretariat of the TsK MOPR, 8.5.1926, RGASPI, 17/85/44, 25–27; Protocol of the Session of the Secretariat of the TsK MOPR, 3.10.1927, RGASPI, 17/85/44, 171–172; V.A. Vradii, "Sovetskaia sektsiia MOPR v mezhdunarodnoi kampanii solidarnosti s uznikami Skottsboro, 1931–1932 gg." in A.A. Makarenko and V.A. Vradii (eds.), *Massovye dvizheniia solidarnosti. Traditsii i sovremennost'* (Kiev: Naukova dumka, 1983), pp. 98–118; V.A. Vradii, "Kampanii solidarnosti s N. Sakko i B. Vantsetti, uznikami Skottsboro i uchastie v nikh trudiashchikhsia SSSR" (Avtoreferat kand. diss., Uzhgorodskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1988). On international solidarity and the British Strike of 1926, see Chapter 4.

59 "Zhetony", *Biulleten' TsK MOPR* 13 (1924), p. 6; "Denezhnyi otchet Khar'kovskogo...", p. 6.

60 The whole correspondence of this case is located at: Russian State Military Archive, Moscow (in the following: RGVA), 33987/2/255, 6–12.

61 "Ob aktive. Tsirkuliarnoe pis'mo N° 66", *Biulleten' TsK MOPR* 17–18 (1925), p. 12; as well as numerous other articles.

was done by a few activists, while the majority of the membership was “active” by paying their membership fees, if at all. While the idea of making active work (in addition to paying fees) mandatory for members was discussed in MOPR publications, it seems that this was never put into practice.⁶² A German-speaking IRA representative captured this state of affairs after having visited the Kostroma province in 1926:

From *gubkom* down to the factory cell, it's the same situation. Everywhere one can see that the work is done only by one or maximum 2–3 persons. [...] The cells have very few active comrades. [...] There is a lack of sufficient attempts to involve active non-party comrades in work.⁶³

In factory clubs, village libraries and other institutions, the cells were expected to organise “MOPR corners” as centres of the organisation's local work. Decorated with posters, portraits and equipped with brochures, these “corners” were to inform others of the suffering of revolutionaries in foreign countries and to mobilise support.⁶⁴ For their members, the cells were supposed to set up courses and lectures on the foreign revolutionary movement. In order to enlighten non-members, agitprop-theatre plays and recitals of revolutionary poetry were to be performed at workers' clubs.⁶⁵

An important field of activity for the MOPR were its sponsorships (*shefstva*) of political prisoners in the West. The *shefstvo* system originated from the Civil War years when factories or communes sponsored Red Army units both materially and morally.⁶⁶ The MOPR adopted this system of sponsorship in such a way that each region was assigned to a certain Western prison with a large number of political prisoners, and the individual prisoners were in turn assigned to local organisations.⁶⁷ MOPR activists were advised to write letters to their “fosterlings”, to send them money and to make them hand-crafted presents. All this was delivered to the prisoners via the Comintern's secret

62 Ia. Mutsenek, *Partiia i MOPR* (Dnepropetrovsk: Izdanie Dnepropetrovskogo okruzhkoma MOPR'a, 1926), p. 14.

63 „Bericht über die Arbeit in der [sic] Kostromer Gubkom vom Schwaub [?] A. Adamesku [?]“, [1926], GARF, 8265/3/18, 131–133.

64 Mutsenek, *Partiia i MOPR*, pp. 16, 51–52.

65 Nik. Maslenikov (ed.), *MOPR. Agitsbornik dlia rabochikh klubov* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1924).

66 David R. Stone, “Shefstvo. Lev Trotsky and the Military Origins of Revolutionary Patronage”, *Revolutionary Russia* 191 (2006), pp. 23–36.

67 For an early list of prisons and their assignment to MOPR *gubkomy*, see: “Sovetskie shefy uznikov kapitalisticheskikh tiurem”, *Biulleten' TsK MOPR* 3 (1923), p. 3.

communication channels.⁶⁸ For the prisoners overseen by the IRA in the West such deliveries were an important means of maintaining morale, while for the Comintern it was a means of maintaining the prisoners' faith in the Soviet Union. The prisoners replied with heart-felt letters to their sponsors in the Soviet Union, which were read out at meetings and re-printed in the local press. Soviet MOPR activists received guidelines on how to write such letters⁶⁹ and, of course, all letters passed through the MOPR's Central Committee and were supervised, censored and even held back, if they did not adhere to the political line. Still, this personal correspondence constituted genuine transnational contacts which, in turn, gave Soviet MOPR activists a sense of belonging to an international revolutionary community. For the local press, they also provided a substitute for "human interest stories" which were, according to Jeffrey Brooks, largely absent from early Soviet media.⁷⁰ These sponsored political prisoners indeed rose to local prominence. One of the last living MOPR rank-and-file activists from Viatka (nowadays Kirov), when interviewed in 2001, could not remember the names of the local MOPR leaders, but did recall Max Hoelz, the German Communist prisoner sponsored by his organisation.⁷¹

These personal connections could, however, easily become problematic in the eyes of the MOPR's central organs. Firstly, these connections had the potential to collide with the Comintern's international campaigns against inner-party oppositions. In October 1926, a puzzled local MOPR organisation wrote to the Central Committee asking whether they should continue writing to the German Communist, Hugo Urbahns, since they had read in Soviet newspapers that he had been declared an "enemy" of the party.⁷² Furthermore, Western prisoners turned out to be far less ideologically reliable than the MOPR in Moscow had expected them to be. The German prisoner Ewald Max Wingerning, who was assigned to an MOPR cell at a leather factory in Viatka, turned out to be a Left Communist, and replied to the first letter of his "sponsors" with an emotional 20-page appeal in favour of the Left Opposition. The Central Committee was bewildered to such an extent that it kept this letter in its archives for nearly a year, after which Elena Stasova personally wrote an indignant

68 "Polozhenie o shefstve", *Biulleten' TsK MOPR* 5 (1925), p. 3.

69 D. Utkeš and Iv. Martynov, *Pereklichka. Materialy po shefstvu nad politzakliuchennymi* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo TsK MOPR, 1926).

70 Jeffrey Brooks, "Pravda and the Language of Power in Soviet Russia, 1917–28", in Jeremy Popkin (ed.), *Media and Revolution. Comparative Perspectives* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1994), pp. 156–173.

71 Zmeeva, "Istoriia Viatskogo MOPRa", p. 128.

72 Letter of the Irkutsk *gubkom* of the MOPR to the Central Committee of the MOPR, 22.10.1926, GARF, 8265/3/18, 94–95.

reply to Wingerning and passed it on to the MOPR cell in Viatka for a signature (without showing them the initial letter).⁷³ Such occurrences were presumably the motivation behind the MOPR's the decision to de-personalise these connections and move towards "sponsoring" the inmates of whole prisons and not individual prisoners.⁷⁴

Taking care of Western political immigrants was another broad field of activity for the MOPR. The organisation's efforts to ensure life and employment for Western Communist refugees in the Soviet Union, and the multiple human and institutional conflicts that arose from these attempts, are worth a separate study and cannot be dealt with in detail here.⁷⁵ More important for the MOPR's impact on Soviet society on a larger scale were the efforts to utilise these immigrants as messengers of solidarity. The MOPR sent immigrants, preferably those who had prison experiences in the West, to tour the provinces, so that MOPR grass roots activists and the general populace could see with their own eyes who it was they were helping. Such tours were seen by the MOPR leadership as useful for the general public as well as for the immigrants themselves, being a means of integrating them into society.⁷⁶

MOPR organisations in the provinces often saw such tours as being very effective. A report about sending two Spanish Communists to Arkhangel'sk province in late 1924 noted that, in just one week, they had spoken to over 1,800 listeners at several events. The regional MOPR organisation reported to Moscow that these foreigners were being enthusiastically greeted and that their appearance was "a great help" to the organisation.⁷⁷ Such tours were, of course, not always a success: In 1928, the regional MOPR branch in Smolensk complained to the Central Committee about a Polish immigrant who had been assigned to them to hold speeches. Not only was the Pole a miserable speaker,

73 RGASPI, 539/3/461, 164–189, 207–214. Wingerning's letter is dated approx. June 1926, Stasova's reply stems from July 1927.

74 Protokol soveshchaniia po voprosu o sostoianii i blizhaishikh zadachakh shefstva, 14.5.1926, GARF, 8265/3/12, 1–2. For a similarly problematic MOPR-sponsored *shefstvo* relationship to German anarchist poet Erich Mühsam, see: Gleb J. Albert, "Es ist immerhin zu befürchten, dass Mühsam in Russland enttäuscht wird". Zu Erich Mühsams veränderter Russlandreise 1925", *Jahrbuch für Forschungen zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 14:1 (2015), pp. 5–27.

75 For MOPR and German political immigrants in the Soviet Union, see, a.o., Carola Tischler, *Flucht in die Verfolgung. Deutsche Emigranten im sowjetischen Exil, 1933 bis 1945* (Münster: Lit, 1996).

76 A. Kh., "MOPR i polit. emigranty", *Biulleten' TsK MOPR* 14 (1924), p. 1.

77 Letter of Arkhangel'sk *gubkom* of the MOPR to the EC of the IRA, 9.12.1924, GARF, 8265/1/1, 136–136ob.

but he had actually been living in the area for several years, so that people in the audience recognised him and asked whether there were any “real” political immigrants in the USSR.⁷⁸

One advantage of “personalised” sponsorships of political prisoners was that the MOPR could use them in the Soviet Union to promote its cause once they were set free and allowed to seek refuge in the USSR. Thus, speakers’ tours by freed political prisoners to visit their former “sponsors” were special events. When Max Hoelz was allowed to emigrate to the Soviet Union in 1929, he was given a triumphant welcome in Viatka.⁷⁹ Not only had Hoelz’s case been extensively promoted in Viatka during the 1920s, but also his appearance and behaviour did correspond to the stereotype of a proletarian rebel. Other “sponsored” immigrants were rather a disappointment to their “sponsors” once they could see them with their own eyes. The aforementioned MOPR veteran remembered in 2001 how disappointed he was when the Polish Communist, Stanisław Łańcucki, whom his organisation was sponsoring, was presented to them in 1929: “He wore a green suit and had a small beard. Well, he looked like a Member of Parliament!”⁸⁰

MOPR Activists: Affiliations and Experiences

Who were the people who participated in these practices? Here, we have to differentiate between, on the one hand, activists and functionaries, who were the moving force of the organisation, and, on the other hand, the mass of largely passive rank-and-file members. To elaborate further on MOPR functionaries at a regional level, we shall turn once again to the self-evaluation exercise carried out in 1925. Of the 731 leading functionaries of the regional MOPR branches, 528 were party members. While 17.4% of those who responded did not provide any information on their *partstazh* (the number of years spent within the ranks of the party), 14.5% stated that they had joined the party before 1917, 8.5% had joined in the year of the revolution, and 59.4% had joined its ranks after 1917.⁸¹ Thus, the bulk of MOPR’s functionaries stemmed from the post-revolutionary period, when the party had transformed itself from a revolutionary movement into a ruling elite. However, this percentage of “old Bolsheviks” in the MOPR

78 Letter of Smolensk *gubkom* of the MOPR to the TsK MOPR, 21.3.1928, GARF, 8265/4/12, 24–24ob.

79 Plener, *Max Hoelz*.

80 Zmeeva, “Istoriia Viatskogo MOPRa”, p. 138.

81 Calculated from GARF, 8265/1/3.

is still remarkably high, if we compare it to *partstazh* figures for the party as a whole. Already in 1922, just 2 % of party members had joined the party before 1917 (while 8.5 % had joined in 1917), and in 1927, “old Bolsheviks” accounted for a mere 0.8 % (2.6 % with a 1917 *partstazh*) of the total party membership.⁸² One could argue that the regional MOPR leadership was mostly recruited from regional party leadership. This seems largely true, but the presence of “old Bolsheviks” in regional party committees was not a given: in 1922, party statutes restricted regional party leadership to pre-revolutionary *partstazh*,⁸³ while in 1925 (just as the MOPR was gaining popularity) this restriction was abolished.⁸⁴

Thus, the percentage of “old Bolsheviks” on a regional level constitutes a remarkable feature of the MOPR. One hypothesis to explain this might be that those within the party leadership, who were estranged from party life by the New Economic Policy and the influx of “careerist” functionaries into party organs, could channel their political energy into this new organisation. While the party was preoccupied with its own in-fighting and the first shift towards “building Socialism in one country”, old activists in the MOPR could practise international solidarity, a rallying point that had featured so prominently in the party’s ideological agenda during the years of revolution and civil war.⁸⁵ Indeed, the MOPR leadership was aware of the fact that the organisation’s work might be particularly attractive to revolutionary veterans. Ian Mutsenek, a regional MOPR leader, argued in a pamphlet that they were the ones who would feel most connected to the aims and goals of the MOPR because they knew repression from their own experiences.⁸⁶ As an organisational consequence, the MOPR actively called for the recruitment of its *aktiv* cadres from these “old underground fighters”.⁸⁷

The documents from the 1925 All-Union Congress offer information on the regional MOPR leaders’ life experiences. The delegates’ questionnaires include the participants’ past experiences of “counter-revolutionary repression”, be it in Tsarist times or during the Civil War. Combined with the participants’ *partstazh*, the answers indicate that almost all MOPR cadres from old Bolshevik

82 Altrichter, *Die Sowjetunion von der Oktoberrevolution bis Stalins Tod*, 1, pp. 343–344.

83 Gerald M. Easter, *Reconstructing the State. Personal Networks and Elite Identity in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 39.

84 Sergej A. Golovin, “Chlenstvo v RKP(b)-VKP(b) kak osnovnoi put’ povysheniia sotsial’nogo statusa. 1920–1930-e gg.” *Otechestvennaia istoriia* 3 (2008), p. 35.

85 For international Communism and the Comintern’s “mass organisations”, it also has been observed that party members often preferred work in these organisations to actual party work, see Bayerlein, “Das neue Babylon”, p. 231. See further Chapter 1.

86 Mutsenek, *Partiia i MOPR*, p. 27.

87 “Ob aktive. Tsirkuliarnoe pis’mo N° 66”, *Biulleten’ TsK MOPR* 17–18 (1925), p. 12.

stock, as well as those who had joined during the Civil War years, had shared this experience. Thus, the hardships of Western revolutionaries must have been anything but abstract to them.⁸⁸ It appears that the MOPR provided a field of activity for veterans by offering them party work they could personally relate to, but without encapsulating themselves into purely memorial work like in the party's veteran societies. After all, in the MOPR they also came in contact with other party functionary cohorts – be it at the congresses or at the “evenings of remembrance” which Mutsenek suggested should be organised within the MOPR so that the younger generations could understand the sufferings of revolutionaries in the West through the testimonies of those veterans who had endured similar repressions under the Tsar.⁸⁹ However, before we make any hasty conclusions about veterans being the core of MOPR's functionaries, we must bear in mind what Kiseleva pointed out concerning “mass societies” cadres: while it was most often party figures of prominence who figured as heads of the regional and local branches, the everyday organising work was delegated by them to figures of secondary importance, and these might rather have seen their activity in a “mass society” as a mere step along their career ladder.⁹⁰

While it would require a separate study to develop a prosopography of MOPR functionaries, it can be noted that their background and possible motives were diverse: from genuine enthusiasm to a sense of party duty and careerism, much like in other “mass societies” in the early Soviet Union.⁹¹ Only the high percentage of “old Bolsheviks” sharply distinguished the MOPR from other “societies” and corresponded with its revolutionary and internationalist agenda, which also stood in stark contrast to comparable organisational undertakings in Soviet society.

These functionaries were, however, not what made MOPR a “mass” society. Who were the MOPR's rank-and-file and what sort of activities did they undertake, apart from posing with the organisation's banners in mass gatherings (Figure 2.2)? Despite drawbacks in 1925 and 1927, the MOPR was able to provide impressive membership figures throughout its development. It is not really clear, however, who constituted the bulk of the membership, and what exactly they were doing.

88 See GARF, 8265/1/4 and 8265/1/5. This proves the conclusion that Kiseleva made while relying on MOPR publications alone, see Kiseleva, “Dobrovol'nye obshchestva v Sovetskoï Rossii”, p. 416.

89 Mutsenek, *Partiia i MOPR*, p. 29.

90 Kiseleva, “Dobrovol'nye obshchestva”, pp. 587–591.

91 Cf. for the Osoaviakhim: Nikonova, *Vospitanie patriotov*.



FIGURE 2.2 MOPR demonstration, presumably in Bezhetsk (Tver guberniia), 1920s

SOURCE: RGASPI 539/5/796, 9.

The MOPR and the “Masses”

In its membership policy, the MOPR was both exclusive and inclusive at the same time. On the one hand, membership was restricted to “toilers”, while people who had been stripped of their voting rights were excluded via its statutes.⁹² Also, the NEP bourgeoisie and the well-to-do peasants were its ideological enemies and clearly not a target for membership. A provincial MOPR journal wrote: “Even if the *nepman* will come carrying ten roubles, we will not take him into our ranks. A *kulak* with his money sack will not join us either.”⁹³ This policy is also reflected in instructions sent to local branches which made it clear that they were not to allow the “bourgeois” or their children to join the MOPR.⁹⁴ In practice, however, the MOPR was, apparently, more open than either the party or other political institutions. A decision taken by the MOPR

92 Kushner, *Materialy po MOPR*, p. 78; *V pomoshch' iacheike MOPR. Rukovodiashchie materialy o rabote iacheek* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo TsK MOPR SSSR, 1927), p. 10.

93 Zriachii, „O chlenakh MOPR'a“, *Ezhemesiachnyi biulleten' Omskogo otdeleniia MOPR'a* 1 (1924), p. 5.

94 “Pochtovyi iashchik”, *Biulleten' TsK MOPR* 6 (1925), p. 8.

leadership, ordering that MOPR members “without voting rights” were not allowed to be excluded from cells without the consent of higher organs, hints at the fact that these so-called *lishentsy*, otherwise political outcasts in Soviet society, could obtain at least an affiliation with the MOPR (that is, if they managed to join).⁹⁵

Both in their official documents and in their internal discussions, MOPR functionaries often pointed out that their organisation was particularly attractive to peasants – even more attractive than any other Communist undertaking. The MOPR issued special guidelines for agitators speaking to peasants, urging them to appeal to feelings of compassion with suffering prisoners as well as to the villagers’ practical sense. If we preserve the imprisoned vanguard, the MOPR argued, foreign workers and peasants will gain victory over the oppressors when the time comes, and then Soviet peasants will obtain foreign machinery to make their own lives easier.⁹⁶ Lepeshinskii pointed out in an internal debate that the MOPR came to the peasants with clear and simple slogans and had the advantage of not being associated with any topics too close to the state (such as taxation or conscription).⁹⁷ In one brochure, the MOPR leader went even further and claimed that the peasant would give his kopeck to a Communist prisoner in the West “with delight”.⁹⁸

As may be apparent, there was a large portion of wishful thinking in all this. In late 1925, throughout the whole Soviet Union, the percentage of peasants within the MOPR stood at 22 per cent (cf. 39 per cent workers, 29 per cent white-collar employees and 10 per cent “others”).⁹⁹ Throughout the country, however, this figure was subject to large variations: for example, in May 1925, in the *guberniia* of Saratov, 32 per cent of the 100,000 MOPR members were peasants, while at the same time in the *guberniia* of Nizhnii Novgorod (not less rural), peasants did not even constitute 1 per cent of the 70,000-strong membership.¹⁰⁰ And, considering the fact that absorbing whole villages into the organisation (and collecting their membership fee as a sort of tax) was not an uncommon phenomenon throughout the 1920s,¹⁰¹ we should approach these

95 Protocol of the Secretariat of the TsK MOPR, 23.5.1927, RGASPI, 17/85/44, 151–152.

96 „Pochemu krest'ianin dolzhen byt' chlenom MOPR? Konspekt doklada“, *Biulleten' TsK MOPR* 8–9 (1924), p. 2.

97 RGASPI, 17/85/44, 225–236, here 225–226: Meeting of the party fraction..., 25 January 1926.

98 Panteleimon N. Lepeshinskii, *MOPR – detishche Oktiabria* (Moskva: TsK MOPR SSSR, 1925), pp. 12–13.

99 Babaeva, “MOPR v tsifrakh”.

100 Report of a meeting of the TsK MOPR with representatives from the provinces, 1.5.1925, GARF, 8265/1/1, 26–29.

101 Saran, *Vlast' i obshchestvennye organizatsii Tsentral'noi Rossii*, p. 193.

figures with even more suspicion than other Soviet statistics, and assume that they do not reflect any sort of “real” individual involvement within the organisation. Also, while imagining the MOPR as being particularly attractive to the peasantry, the leadership was certainly aware that there was very little MOPR agitprop work actually being done in the countryside, since the deficiencies of the organisation’s activities in the villages were an ever-recurring topic in all MOPR self-evaluations throughout the 1920s.¹⁰² With the blessing of Trotsky as head of the army, the MOPR even launched a campaign aimed at de-mobilised soldiers who were supposed to return to their villages and act as MOPR organisers and agitators,¹⁰³ but there is no evidence that this particular initiative enjoyed any great success.

On the other hand, it is not altogether implausible that the MOPR may have been attractive to individual peasants. Lepeshinskii was right to point out that the MOPR was not appealing to anything that could remind the peasantry too much of state coercion. Instead, it attempted to evoke empathy for people’s suffering and this could then tie in with the philanthropic traditions of pre-revolutionary society, particularly during World War I, and even to some extent with the religious piety of the countryside.¹⁰⁴ The fact that the targets of this particular empathy were revolutionaries in foreign countries does not render peasant support completely unlikely. Recent research has shown that the Russian peasantry, through late imperial literacy campaigns as well as through the globalising experience of World War I, were much less isolationist than older historiography has assumed them to be. It is surely no coincidence that the MOPR had some of its greatest successes in the *guberniia* of Viatka where, as recent research by Aaron Retish has shown, peasants had developed a strong sense of citizenship during the years of civil war.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, the means by which the MOPR generated revenue in the countryside – collections, lotteries,

102 See, for example, Mutsenek, *Partiia i MOPR*, p. 50.

103 Letter of the TsK MOPR to Lev Trotskii, 10.4.1924, RGVA, 33987/2/255, 3: “Tov. Trotsky – Tsentral’nomu Komitetu MOPR’a”, *MOPR* 3 (1924), p. 3; Kushner, *Materialy po MOPR*, p. 118.

104 Adele Lindenmeyr, *Voluntary Associations and the Russian Autocracy. The Case of Private Charity* (Pittsburgh, Pa: Center for Russian and East European Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 1990); Irina B. Belova, *Pervaia mirovaia voina i rossiiskaia provintsii. 1914 – fevral’ 1917 g.* (Moskva: AIRO-XXI, 2011), pp. 198–209. Pious concerns could involve even non-voluntary forms of fund-raising, see Vera Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 61.

105 Scott J. Seregny, “Zemstvos, Peasants, and Citizenship: The Russian Adult Education Movement and World War I”, *Slavic Review* 59:2 (2000), pp. 290–315; Scott J. Seregny, “Peasants, Nation, and Local Government in Wartime Russia”, *Slavic Review* 59:2 (2000), pp. 336–342; Aaron B. Retish, *Russia’s Peasants in Revolution and Civil War. Citizenship,*

benefit performances and the like – tied in with pre-revolutionary forms of charity, no matter what “revolutionary” content the MOPR was trying to include in it.¹⁰⁶

Indeed, during the first few years, the MOPR enjoyed at least some partial success in the countryside. Several letters sent to the party's peasant newspaper *Krest'ianskaia gazeta* in 1924 attest to the fact that MOPR cells had been organised in villages which were trying to turn the peasants' attention towards issues of international solidarity.¹⁰⁷ However, as regional studies have shown, the MOPR was never able to maintain a steady membership in the countryside. These rural cells were formed either in the wake of the general internationalist enthusiasm of late 1923, or as part of the MOPR's outreach campaigns – but after these were over, there were only village “intellectuals” such as teachers and scribes who remained in its ranks.¹⁰⁸ A few individual peasants may certainly have enjoyed being bearers of a “new culture” in their villages, actively promoting the MOPR as part of Soviet *obshchestvennost'* despite being shunned by fellow villagers,¹⁰⁹ and several other villagers may have sympathised with the MOPR for its charity aspects. The vast majority of the MOPR's peasant members, however, remained passive.

Such peasants who were willing to involve themselves in the MOPR were likely to be put off by its organisational deficiencies. A peasant correspondent wrote to *Krest'ianskaia gazeta* in 1928:

For the past year, the [...] MOPR organisation more or less existed. But in this year [19]28 no-one hears a thing about it, I guess it has all died down, even the members who have joined the organisation earlier do not know to whom to pay their membership fees, let alone [the MOPR's] work. There are indeed many people who want to join the MOPR organisation but the thing is, they do not know where and how to do it. Such an

Identity, and the Creation of the Soviet State, 1914–1922 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

106 These connections are explored in Pavlikov, *Sozdanie i deiatel'nost'*.

107 For numerous letters, see Russian State Archive of the Economy (in the following: RGAE), 396/2/82.

108 Aleksei N. Kharin, “Vneshniaia politika sovetskogo pravitel'stva v vospriiatii rukovodstva i naseleniia Viatskoi gubernii. 1917–1925 gg.” (Kand. diss., Viatskii gosudarstvennyi pedagogicheskii universitet, 2000), p. 139; Pavlikov, *Sozdanie i deiatel'nost'*, pp. 85–87.

109 Sheila Fitzpatrick recounts the life story of one such peasant activist, who promoted the MOPR in the village amongst other Soviet initiatives, in her “Supplicants and Citizens. Public Letter-Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s”, *Slavic Review* 1 (1996), p. 101.

organisation is not worth a penny, to be honest, and it will not help any foreign prisoners whatsoever. It would be better to let it die in peace.¹¹⁰

Another author from the same region complained that:

In [...] the village of Gaidukovo an MOPR cell was founded in 1925, and during its whole existence [...] the organisation has not organised a single useful lecture, its members just pay the fees and do not get anything useful out of it, the organiser of the MOPR cell does not even have membership stamps, so it is not of any interest at all to join that cell.¹¹¹

In the cities, the MOPR had a better standing. Amongst workers, at least in the capitals, there were traditions of class solidarity that were still alive in the first years after the revolution. In his study of Petrograd workers, Sergei Iarov points out that for the years 1918–1919 he could find no example where fund-raising campaigns for other workers (be it in other towns or abroad) were met with any resistance.¹¹² However, this did not automatically lead to the embracement of the MOPR a few years later – especially considering the political expropriation of the workers which had taken place in the meantime.¹¹³ In his history of Moscow's "Serp i Molot" metal plant, Kevin Murphy points out that when party activists tried to establish an MOPR cell, it was largely ignored by the workers, and its poster exhibitions were even regularly vandalised. Shortly before that, however, workers of the same plant had been eagerly collecting money in late 1923 for German children.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, the MOPR could also count on some support amongst workers. The aforementioned veteran MOPR member, a worker who had joined the organisation in 1924, remembered in his 2001 interview that, after listening to agitators, he had felt pity for the prisoners in the West and had thus signed up to join the MOPR. The membership fees, which appeared very low to him, made the decision easier.¹¹⁵

Particularly the Communist sympathisers amongst the youth, working class or otherwise, could be mobilised for MOPR membership. Driven by romantic

110 Letter from Il'ia Riazankin (*Kaluga guberniia*), 15.5.1928, RGAE, 396/6/96, 131.

111 Letter from Iurchenkov (*Kaluga guberniia*), [1929], RGAE, 396/6/96, 37–37ob.

112 Sergej V. Iarov, *Konformizm v Sovetskoi Rossii. Petrograd 1917-1920-kh godov* (Sankt-Peterburg: Evropeiskii Dom, 2006), p. 505.

113 See most recently Simon Pirani, *The Russian Revolution in Retreat, 1920–24. Soviet Workers and the New Communist Elite* (London: Routledge, 2008).

114 Kevin Murphy, *Revolution and Counterrevolution. Class Struggle in a Moscow Metal Factory* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), p. 84.

115 Zmeeva, „Istoriia Viatskogo MOPRa“, p. 134.

imaginations of world revolution, and fascinated by the hypothetic possibility of real transnational communication (e.g. through a personal correspondence with Western prisoners), they could be easily won over to the MOPR's cause. Several memoirs from Russians growing up in the 1920s attest to the fact that it was actually quite prestigious and fashionable to be an MOPR member.¹¹⁶ They must have been proud to wear the organisation's badges, nearly 2 million of which were produced by the MOPR in 1924 alone.¹¹⁷ These badges, which depicted a hand behind bars and chains, were also sold to non-members, although members were allowed to wear a particular version of the badge.¹¹⁸

A "Second Party"? The Troubled Relationships between the MOPR and the Communist Party

While other sections of the International Red Aid did their best to portray themselves as being independent organisations without subordination to either the party or to the Comintern, the MOPR did not even attempt to do this. In a society whose ruling party strove to dominate political communication by dissolving the borders between party and the public, it was obvious that such an organisation had to be closely linked with the party.¹¹⁹ In a front-page *Pravda* article, one of the MOPR leaders, S. Temkin, characterised his organisation as being "one of the transmission belts that strengthens the bond between the party and the non-party masses".¹²⁰ In terms of its active cadres, the MOPR was, as indicated above, tightly bound to the party. The party's 13th congress in May 1924, dealing with "voluntary mass societies", advised party members to take "ideal-political leadership" and to strengthen the work of Communist fractions within these societies.¹²¹

116 Lew Kopelew, *Und schuf mir einen Götzen. Lehrjahre eines Kommunisten* (München: dtv, 1981), p. 94; B.V. Vozdvizhenskii, "Selo Porga, ego upadok i gibel'. Vospominaniia", *Kostromskaia zemlia* 6 (2006), p. 350–446.

117 Information by the EC IRA about badges, 10.3.1925, RGASPI, 539/2/140, 23–230b.

118 See the different badges at <<http://izhig.ru/badges/badge-society-mopr.php>>.

119 For concepts of the "public" in Communist societies, see most recently: Jan C. Behrends, "Repräsentation und Mobilisierung. Eine Skizze zur Geschichte der Öffentlichkeit in der Sowjetunion und in Osteuropa (1917–1991)", in Ute Daniel and Axel Schildt (eds.), *Massenmedien im Europa des 20. Jahrhundert* (Köln: Böhlau, 2010), pp. 229–254.

120 S. Temkin, "MOPR i RKP", *Pravda*, 9.9.1923.

121 *Trinadtsati s'ezd RKP(b). Mai 1924 goda. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1963), p. 609.

However, in practice, the relationship between the MOPR and the party was far more problematic than it might initially have appeared. Since its inception, the IRA's co-operation with the party, in relation to its activities within the USSR, did not develop as smoothly as had been expected. While the TsK RKP(b) initially issued a circular to its regional branches in order to promote the new organisation, already a few months later the TsK, to the annoyance of leading IRA functionaries, delayed sending out any information regarding the first "MOPR Day" on 18 March.¹²² Over the next few years, the MOPR often had reasons to complain about the unwillingness of the party's press and publishing houses to co-operate.¹²³ These were more than just intra-institutional quarrels. There is documentary evidence to suggest that the party leadership was worried that, since the MOPR was following such a "political" goal as practicing internationalism, it could become a potential rival to the party itself.

At the aforementioned meeting of MOPR functionaries in June 1924, such concerns were actively discussed. The main concern was that the MOPR, after having experienced such a massive influx of members, was not receiving enough attention from the party. This was even more important since mass internationalism was now waning after the initial wave of enthusiasm caused by the planned, though aborted, "German October". Stanislav Pestkovskii, one of the MOPR leaders, concluded the discussion with the statement that "the TsK RKP(b) ignored us, it didn't control us, and now that we have grown, it is afraid of us for whatever reason".¹²⁴ The reason why the party leadership might have been "afraid" of the MOPR did emerge during the same discussion, when the aforementioned Permiakov proclaimed that: "The Russian worker and peasant will not approach internationalism [*k internatsionalizmu ... ne poidet*] through the party. He will approach it through the MOPR". Eratov, from the MOPR's Revision Commission, seconded: "The MOPR has to take its rightful place in the int[ernational] workers' movement. We shall not beg for it, but demand our recognition!"¹²⁵ Another MOPR leader insisted that while the party "does not wish to recognise our political aims and our independence, [...] [it] cannot ignore the fact that we have 2,000,000 members".

122 Protocol N° 10 of the Session of the Central Bureau of the IRA, 17.2.1923, RGASPI, 539/2/2, 55–56; Protocol N° 11 of the Session of the Central Bureau of the IRA, 2.3.1923, RGASPI, 539/2/2, 56–59.

123 Telegram of the TsK MOPR to Russian Telegraph Agency (ROSTA), 14.4.1925, RGASPI, 539/2/142, 28; Letter from the TsK MOPR to Agitprop TsK RKP(b), 17.6.1925, RGASPI, 539/2/140, 34.

124 RGASPI, 539/2/3, 33–38, here 38: „Protokol soveshchaniia...“, 18.6.1924.

125 Ibid., 35.

Instantly, the discussion participants realised that they were on the verge of violating a sacred tenet of Soviet Communism: that only the party could be a “political organisation” as such. Several attendees jumped into the fray. Grigorii Geiler reprimanded the participants: “Don’t get carried away! The MOPR is not a party, but a transmission belt to pull the masses into the RKP”.¹²⁶ Another functionary, Mitskevich, went even further: If you think you are a political organisation, he asked, what is your programme, what are your tactics? This caused Lepeshinskii to explode – how could Mitskevich accuse us of forming a party? And while Mitskevich interjected that he was not talking about a party, Lepeshinskii rebuked him: “No, you were talking about a party, because you asked about our programme and tactics!”¹²⁷ Much of the rest of the meeting was taken up with acrimonious interjections about how anyone could assume that loyal party functionaries and veterans would form their own political party, and that the MOPR was completely loyal and just fulfilling the party’s tasks – with a conclusion that the TsK should be approached for more “guidance” over the MOPR. This plea was strengthened by the MOPR leadership in a letter to the TsK RKP(b) shortly thereafter.¹²⁸

The “guidance” from the party arrived fairly rapidly – yet not in the way that the MOPR leadership had envisioned it would. In early 1925, the party leadership realised that the creation of the Soviet *obshchestvennost’* through the setting up of multiple “voluntary societies” was not developing as planned. At a crisis meeting called by the TsK’ Organisation Bureau (Orgburo), Sergei Syrtsov drastically pointed out that the present state of affairs was “a caricature of Soviet *obshchestvennost’* which hinders its development”.¹²⁹ The assembled party leaders, among them Kalinin and Molotov, were mostly concerned about the fact that the numerous organisations with their membership dues and donations would be too much of a burden upon the working population, and the fact that many “voluntary societies” overlapped with each other in their tasks. It is, however, remarkable that one of the original proposals at this meeting involved the abolition of the MOPR, despite its large membership and its low membership fees, to be merged with the Mezhrabpom (the Soviet branch of the International Workers’ Relief). This question was controversially discussed at the meeting, although without shedding any light on the reasons behind

126 Ibid.

127 Ibid., 35–36.

128 Letter from the EC IRA to Secretariat TsK RKP(b), [after July 1924], RGASPI, 539/2/140, 21–210b.

129 Shorthand report of the discussion on mass societies at the Orgburo, 12.1.1925, RGASPI, 17/112/629, 194–223, here 212.

such considerations.¹³⁰ It can only be assumed that the party leadership was uncomfortable with both the MOPR and the Mezhrabpom as neither of them was under complete Soviet control, and they were instead being led, at least partially, by international Communists.

In the end, the general resolution on “mass societies” issued by the Orgburo on that day, while rejecting collective membership and coercion, did not mention the MOPR.¹³¹ At the same time, however, the Orgburo issued another resolution aimed specifically at the internationalist organisation. It ordered the MOPR to stop its mass recruiting, to concentrate on the education of its present members and, most importantly, to stop its mass campaigns, effectively taking away its best means of raising funds and recruiting new members. And while this resolution explicitly did not withdraw party “guidance” over the MOPR, it did advise party cells in the regions against “pedantic interference” into the affairs of the MOPR cells.¹³² This was hardly a productive measure from the MOPR leadership’s point of view, since party cadres were the core of the MOPR’s regional and local activity. They had already been admonished on various occasions for their lacklustre engagement, and had been instructed to engage themselves more fully in the MOPR’s activities. The organisation’s brochures never ceased to remind party cells to put more effort into their MOPR work, not only overseeing MOPR cells, but “feeling responsible for them”, because otherwise the “passivity” of party members within the MOPR would have a negative effect on non-party activists.¹³³ For many regional party functionaries, however, their work in the MOPR or other “mass societies” was an additional task alongside their “regular” party/state functions, and was certainly seen by many of them to be a burden.¹³⁴

Furthermore, by planting additional party emissaries into the MOPR leadership, the TsK VKP(b) fuelled internal conflicts which shook the organisation up until mid-1926 and even had a negative impact on the financing of other IRA

130 Ibid., 224. The Mezhrabpom, as the International Workers’ Relief was called in Russian, never became a mass society in the USSR, despite several interventions by its founder Willi Münzenberg. For the International Workers’ Relief and Münzenberg’s other transnational solidarity networks, see Chapter 3 of this volume.

131 Resolution of the Orgburo TsK VKP(b), 12.1.1925, RGASPI, 17/112/629, 3–4.

132 “O kharaktere i soderzhanii raboty MOPR-a v SSSR”, 12.1.1925, RGASPI, 17/112/629, 18. This circular was published on 2 February 1925, see Mel’nikov, *V edinom stroiu internatsionalistov*, p. 98. Also see Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, p. 64.

133 Mutsenek, *Partiia i MOPR*, p. 55.

134 Kiseleva, “Dobrovol’nye obshchestva v Sovetskoi Rossii”, p. 40; Peris, *Storming the Heavens*, p. 64.

sections.¹³⁵ A weary Lepeshinskii complained about all this in a letter to Stanislav Kosior, his personal contact, it seems, at the TsK VKP(b) Secretariat. In the same letter, he recounted to Kosior a personal conversation he had had with Viacheslav Molotov, already back then Stalin's right-hand man and one of the most important people in the party's power apparatus. According to Lepeshinskii, Molotov had said that "[t]he MOPR makes a lot of noise, and while noise can be useful sometimes, it can also be harmful. You won't be able to scare us with your millions of members".¹³⁶ If we can rely on Lepeshinskii's story, then it can be assumed that the MOPR was to be kept down on orders from the highest echelons of the party.

The facts that from mid-1925 onwards, Stalin and his party faction had begun to promote their theory of "building Socialism in one country", and that Grigorii Zinoviev, a special patron of the MOPR,¹³⁷ had joined the ranks of the opposition, certainly did not make the MOPR's position in 1926 any easier. The shorthand report of an MOPR leadership meeting in January 1926 shows that not only did the organisation's leaders have to fight against suspicions of forming an independent political force, just as they had had to do two years previously, but they now also had to position themselves within the discourse of the fight against the inner-party opposition and to show that they were not a "pessimistic" organisation – the codeword for a "disbelief" in building socialism in the Soviet Union even without the victory of Communism on a world-wide scale.¹³⁸ What followed were several letters both to the TsK VKP(b) and to Stalin personally, which ensured the loyalty and the importance of the organisation to the party and pleaded that the MOPR again be allowed to organise mass campaigns.¹³⁹ Apparently, the situation only changed after Lepeshinskii retired (or was displaced?) from the MOPR leadership in order to take over

135 Letter of the EC IRA to Central Committee of Red Aid Germany, 26.5.1926, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv, Berlin (SAP-MO-BArch), RY/1/I 4/4/25, 40–45.

136 Letter of Panteleimon Lepeshinskii to Stanislav Kosior, [June 1925], GARF, 8265/3/4, 16–30.

137 A hint that Zinoviev was the MOPR leadership's "special connection" within the Politburo in 1924 is found at RGASPI, 539/2/3, 38. Zinoviev also gave the keynote speech at the All-Union MOPR Conference in 1924: *Pervaia vsesoiuznaia konferentsiia MOPR'a*, pp. 6–12. For Zinov'ev's role in the Comintern discussion on the purpose of the IRA, see Ryle, "International Red Aid and Comintern Strategy".

138 Meeting of the party fraction of the MOPR Plenum, 25.1.1926, RGASPI, 17/85/44, 225–236.

139 Letter from Panteleimon Lepeshinskii to Iosif Stalin, 12.2.1926, RGASPI, 17/85/46, 79–83; Letter from the MOPR leadership to Nikolai Shvernik, [after 1 October 1926], RGASPI, 17/85/45, 15–17.

museum work, and was replaced, in 1927, by another prominent old Bolshevik, Elena Stasova.

The MOPR as a “School of Cadres”, and the Twilight of Internationalism

As already mentioned, work in the MOPR, just as in other “mass societies” (but perhaps, due to MOPR’s more “political” character, especially there), could also be seen as an additional qualification for a career in the party and state apparatus. The MOPR leadership itself promoted this view, as its position vis-à-vis the party was precarious and it was thus seeking to prove the “usefulness” of their organisation. The MOPR’s internal activity report, delivered to the Central Control Commission in 1926, sought to outline two ways in which the organisation could be useful for the state. Firstly, it claimed to succeed in crucially contributing to the new Soviet public sphere:

The MOPR more and more emerges as an organisation of the new proletarian public sphere [*proletarskaia obshchestvennost'*]. It raises and educates whole strata of toilers on the principles of self-expression [*samodeiatel'nost'*], initiative and activity, and in this way helps to eliminate elements of ‘national narrow-mindedness’ and to implant ideas of internationalism.¹⁴⁰

At the same time, in line with the demand emanating from the 13th party congress to use mass societies to foster a new generation of “public workers”,¹⁴¹ it advertised itself as being a Soviet school of cadres:

Our tasks [...] lie in creating cadres of prepared public workers [*obshchestvennykh rabotnikov*] which can at any moment be transferred to strengthen the Soviets, the co-operatives, or any other form of our state-building. We have many facts to prove that the MOPR is a bridge enabling the newly-prepared strata of the toilers to join the ranks of the builders of the Soviet state.¹⁴²

140 “Osnovnye dostizheniia MOPR v SSSR za tri goda ego deiatel'nosti”, [1926], GARF, 8265/3/3, 1–10, here 30b.

141 *Trinadtsati s'ezd RKP(b)*, p. 609.

142 “Osnovnye dostizheniia MOPR v SSSR...”, GARF, 8265/3/3, 1–10, here 5.

The MOPR could indeed contribute to a new “proletarian” *obshchestvennost'* by providing a platform for philanthropic activity, combining it with both a goal that lay beyond the national state and a feeling of belonging to a global context of revolutionary struggle for its members and supporters. With the diminishing importance of internationalism after Stalin's faction had gained power in the party, an internationalist element within the Soviet public sphere was less and less called for. However, in order to preserve an important part of revolutionary heritage that was crucial for the regime's self-legitimation, such an element was still needed – yet it shouldn't make too much “noise”, as Molotov had stressed. With the Communist Party's departure from the NEP model, which included a certain degree of societal plurality (no matter how much it was controlled from above) towards the mobilisational society of Stalinism, the MOPR's activity had to follow suit and became subjected to the regime's day-to-day mobilisational goals. Certainly, throughout the first half of the 1930s, the “sponsorships” of Western prisoners continued, letters between MOPR cells and IRA cells abroad were exchanged, and mass campaigns for “revolutionary” concerns in the capitalist world (e.g. for the “Scottsboro boys”, for prominent political prisoners, for the fight for the Spanish Republic) were still being conducted under the auspices of the MOPR.¹⁴³ Its cells were still active in factories.¹⁴⁴ Yet the organisation did not receive nearly as much attention in the media as it had done in the mid-1920s.

As both a school of cadres and a source of activists for mobilisation “at any moment”, the MOPR was now more useful to the Soviet leadership, in line with other Soviet “mass organisations”, although at the cost of their thematic variety. While the NEP's authoritarian regime was all about what William H. Sewell Jr. called “organising difference”,¹⁴⁵ Stalinism was striving towards a

143 Anatolii I. Avrus, “MOPR i leiptsigskii protsess”, *Voprosy istorii* 1 (1975), pp. 202–207; Anatolii I. Avrus, “MOPR i natsional'no-revoliutsionnaia voina v Ispanii”, in A.A. Makarenko and V.A. Vradii (eds.), *Massovye dvizheniia solidarnosti. Traditsii i sovremennost'* (Kiev: Naukova dumka, 1983), pp. 86–97; Vradii, “Kampanii solidarnosti s N. Sakko i B. Vantsetti”; Jurij A. Lvunin, *Internatsionalizm v deistvii. Internatsional'nye sviazi sovetskogo rabochego klassa v gody sotsialisticheskogo stroitel'stva v SSSR* (Moskva: Mysl', 1985); Gordin, “Formirovanie predstavlenii sovetskikh rabochikh”, pp. 96–110.

144 See e.g.: Aleksei A. Gordin, “Formirovanie predstavlenii sovetskikh rabochikh 30-kh godov o obshchestvenno-politicheskoi zhizni na Zapade. Na materialakh Gor'kovskogo avtozavoda” (Kand. diss., Nizhegorodskii Gosudarsvennyi arkhitekturno-stroitel'nyi universitet, 2004), pp. 90–109.

145 William H. Sewell jr., “Concept(s) of Culture”, in Victoria E. Bonnell (ed.), *Beyond the Cultural Turn. New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 56; Behrends, “Repräsentation und Mobilisierung”.

total mobilisation of society for one central agenda at a time. In 1930, a decree re-defined the aim of all “mass societies” as the “active participation in the socialist construction of the USSR, as well as a contribution to the defence of the country”.¹⁴⁶

The MOPR was now fully engaged both in “building socialism” and in implementing the First Five-Year-Plan (1928–1932). Its regional organisations promoted collectivisation, participated in shock work competition, and even conducted campaigns for better harvesting.¹⁴⁷ In March 1929, the Central Committee of the MOPR ordered its members to set an example in raising work discipline in the construction efforts of the Five-Year-Plan and, even though the MOPR proclaimed that it was highlighting the “international importance” of the Plan,¹⁴⁸ it was certainly not an easy task for the activists to make a connection between this work and the original aim of the MOPR. The slogan “The MOPR worker must be the best shock worker, the MOPR peasant – the best collective farmer, the first in the line of fighters for the general line of the party”,¹⁴⁹ proclaimed by the MOPR in 1932, bore no resemblance whatsoever to international solidarity.

The organisation experienced an impressive growth in membership – from 4 million in 1929 to nearly 10 million in 1932.¹⁵⁰ However, these figures largely resulted from the re-organisation of the trade unions by the party after the toppling of the old “right-opportunist” trade union leadership in 1929. As one of its measures, the party ordered the trade unions to put more serious effort into “internationalist education”, resulting in trade unions imposing on themselves the long-term goal of making every trade union member an MOPR member. Soviet historian Anatolii Avrus praised this measure as making the MOPR a true mass organisation,¹⁵¹ but this mass influx of co-opted members could not but result in the marginalisation of whatever genuine internationalist enthusiasm was left in the organisation. Now it really ceased to matter what the MOPR both stood for and appealed for. After the German attack on the USSR in June 1941 (while the IRA at the same time had been made dysfunctional and international Communism itself was taken off not only the agenda of Soviet *Realpolitik*, but also out of all public propaganda), the MOPR was included in the

146 Il'ina, *Obshchestvennye organizatsii Rossii v 1920-e gody*, p. 39.

147 Avrus, *MOPR v bor'be protiv terrora i fashizma*, pp. 181–196.

148 Ibid., pp. 185–186.

149 Quoted from Ibid., p. 196.

150 Ibid., p. 184.

151 Ibid., pp. 183–184.

country's patriotic efforts, e.g. by collecting money for Red Army tanks instead of for international revolutionaries.¹⁵²

The MOPR was an ambitious project launched by the Bolsheviks to convey the idea of international solidarity, a value of the labour movement, into the wider public. During its initial phase, it picked up the wave of solidarity in the wake of the events in 1923 and tried to institutionalise it as part of a new Soviet public sphere (*obshchestvennost'*). As shown in this short outline of the MOPR's history, this turned out to be problematic in many ways: the party saw in it an annoying and potentially dangerous competitor, and the general public did not flock to join its ranks in order to partake in active solidarity with foreign Communists. And, while internationalism generally took a back seat in the late 1920s, the MOPR became a universal mobilisation resource, eventually giving up most of its original aims. Aleksandr Saran rightfully notes that from the early 1930s onwards, the MOPR "turned into a universal organisation for mass-mobilisation that differed from others [...] only by its name, its badge and the inscription on its membership card".¹⁵³

In spite of all its obstacles, the MOPR did not completely disappear. First of all through the institutionalisation of international solidarity and its decoupling from the party, the MOPR was able to provide an internationalist niche of activity, even after the onset of Stalinism. In the struggle between cosmopolitan and xenophobic tendencies in Soviet society (with the idea of world revolution as a "specially crafted cosmopolitanism"),¹⁵⁴ in the end "[t]he xenophobes won the argument",¹⁵⁵ as Jeffrey Brooks concludes. This does not mean, however, that there was no longer any demand for internationalism. Even in the 1930s, the MOPR could give rank-and-file activists the chance to engage themselves in revolutionary internationalism as an "imagined world in which Soviet citizens belonged to a revolutionary family".¹⁵⁶ During the Spanish Civil War, the MOPR intensified its activity¹⁵⁷ and, even as late as 1941, MOPR-affiliated school children wrote heartfelt letters to the French Section of the Comintern on the anniversary of the Paris Commune.¹⁵⁸

152 V.K. Gusarov, "Deiatel'nost' sovetskoi sektsii MOPR v gody Velikoi otechestvennoi voiny", *Istoriia SSSR* 5 (1982), pp. 141–150.

153 Saran, *Vlast' i obshchestvennye organizatsii Tsentral'noj Rossii*, p. 198.

154 Brooks, "Official Xenophobia and Popular Cosmopolitanism", p. 1441.

155 Ibid., p. 1446.

156 Ibid., p. 1441.

157 Avrus, "MOPR i natsional'no-revoliutsionnaia voina v Ispanii", pp. 89–91.

158 For several such letters, see RGASPI, 517/1/1940, 3–7.

However, through the establishment of ritualised forms of solidarity, as well as through the widely-practised forced co-option of members, the MOPR also contributed to the devaluation of internationalist ideas and practices in Soviet society. While during the years 1918–1923 there was considerable genuine sympathy towards revolutions and revolutionaries in foreign countries, already during the solidarity campaign in support of the British general strike in 1926, resistance against fund-raising and other relief efforts was being largely felt.¹⁵⁹ This can be attributed to the imbalance between a dwindling revolutionary perspective in the West and the Soviet media image of Western revolution, but both the coercive and centralised means utilised during this campaign must also have made people resent practices of solidarity. Furthermore, the concept of the MOPR as a source of cadres for party and state functions could not but result in careerism as the prime motivation to become active in the organisation. All this resulted in international solidarity being perceived by the majority of Soviet citizens as a boring and burdensome matter.

These two contradictory tendencies – internationalist niches of self-determined activism for a politically active minority in a largely xenophobic society and, at the same time, the unattractive and coercive nature of “proletarian internationalism” for the majority – also manifested themselves in state-sponsored internationalist undertakings long after the Soviet section of the MOPR had been dissolved in 1947. The “Clubs for International Friendship” (KID), which carried on the task of “internationalist education” at schools and universities in the Soviet post-war period, can be seen both in their practices and in their social position as the direct successors of the MOPR cells. They operated in a completely different setting, not only in relation to the new conditions of post-Stalinist Soviet society but also in relation to the new geography of international solidarity, with its objects of attention now being mostly located outside the Western world. However, as Iulia Gradskaia has recently shown, their activity had the same characteristics as the inter-war “mass society”: for the majority of the participants, it was just an annoying obligation and a way

159 For the Bolshevik leadership's perspective and planning of this campaign, see Alexander Vatlin, “Class Brothers Unite! The British General Strike and the Formation of the ‘United Opposition’”, in Paul R. Gregory and Norman Naimark (eds.), *The Lost Politburo Transcripts. From Collective Rule to Stalin's Dictatorship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 57–77; Leonid G. Babichenko, ed., “Vseobshchaia zabastovka v Anglii v mae 1926 g. Iz ‘osoboi papki’ Politbiuro TsK VKP(b)”, *Istoricheskii arkhiv* 1 (1995), pp. 5–28. Furthermore, see Chapter 4 of this volume. I am covering popular sentiments in Soviet society towards this campaign in my forthcoming monograph: Albert, Gleb J. *Das Charisma der Weltrevolution. Revolutionärer Internationalismus in der frühen Sowjetgesellschaft, 1917–1927*. Köln e.a.: Böhlau, 2017 (in print).

to show loyalty to the regime, while for a minority, it was a way to of developing their own concepts of international solidarity, closely linked with the official discourse yet still independent or even critical of it.¹⁶⁰

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¹⁶⁰ Iuliia Gradskaia, "Internatsional'noe vospitanie i pozdnesovetskaia solidarnost' s Chili i Latinskoi Amerikoi. Mezhdru geopolitikoi, protestom i samorealizatsiei?" *Laboratorium*, 3 (2011), pp. 118–142.

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In Pursuit of Global International Solidarity? The Transnational Networks of the International Workers' Relief, 1921–1935

Kasper Braskén

In 1931, the International Workers' Relief (*Internationale Arbeiterhilfe*, IAH) organised in Berlin a world congress celebrating its ten-year long work as an international solidarity organisation. It was a 7-day-long extravaganza which brought together Communists, Socialists, anti-imperialist, anti-Fascists and sympathising intellectuals from every corner of the world. Men and women of “all races and colours” joined in the celebrations: Europeans, Chinese, American, Australians, Indians, “Negros”, Swedes, Indonesians, Russians, Egyptians, Greeks and Japanese. This 1931 World Congress was perceived to be an unprecedented opportunity for delegates from all around the world to meet and discuss the “necessary improvement of international unity”.¹ In order to further mark the international character of this event, an international Presidium was elected during the opening session of the World Congress, consisting of representatives from the Soviet Union, Germany, France, Ireland, India, England, West Africa, the USA, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Norway, Uruguay, Egypt, Australia, Indonesia, Spain, China and Holland. Among the prominent figures were such names as Eleanor Despard, Clara Zetkin, Henri Barbusse and Clemens Dutt.²

1 “Münzenbergs große Rede auf dem Weltkongress. Für rote Einheit in der IAH”, *Die Welt am Abend* 238, 12.10.1931, Beilage 2, BArch, R 1501/20197, 96.

2 This Presidium consisted (in the following order) of (1) Hans Abolin, Russia; (2) Hermann Remmele, Germany; (3) Clara Zetkin, Germany; (4) Henri Barbusse, France; (5) Willi Münzenberg, General secretary of the IAH (Germany); (6) Clemens Dutt, India; (7) Eleanor Despard, Ireland; (8) Tom Man, England; (9) Kujaté, West Africa; (10) Gerda Johansson, USA; (11) Bella Saltzberg, USA; (12) Prof. Nejedly, Czechoslovakia; (13) Francesco Misiano, Italy (14) Kettler, Austria; (15) Ivan Skorge, Norway; (16) Maria Fernandez, Uruguay; (17) Ismael Taher, Egypt; (18) Devoyon, France; (19) Georg Ledebour, Germany; (20) Prof. Alfons Goldschmidt, Germany; (21) Jean Devanny, Australia; (22) Todor Pawlow, Bulgaria [?]; (23) Abdul Medjid, Indonesia; (24) Louis Velasquer, Spain; (25) O. Tschang, China; (26) De Visser, Holland; and (27) Georg Dünninghaus, Secretary of the German IAH. “Vorschläge für das Presidium”, Protocol: Weltkongress – Eröffnungssitzung, RGASPI 538/1/8, 4–5.

In total, the various IAH's congresses held in Berlin during this one week in 1931 attracted 230 foreign delegates from at least 40 countries.³

Under the auspices of the Communist International (Comintern), the IAH launched some of the inter-war period's most spectacular international solidarity campaigns under the leadership of the German communist Willi Münzenberg (1889–1940). The central headquarters of the IAH were never located in Moscow, but in Berlin (1921–1933) and in Paris (1933–1935). Throughout this period, the IAH articulated a message of radical international solidarity that was never restricted to a European solidarity. Instead, it specifically promoted the idea of an international solidarity which stretched from West to East and from North to South. As this article will illustrate, the IAH's network connected most parts of the world, as IAH bureaus (either legal or clandestine) were established globally. Most significantly, the IAH was not only an organisation promoting symbolical solidarity, but also an organisation of practical solidarity work which strove to provide food relief during major strikes, lock-outs and natural disasters.

In line with the international character of the IAH, it operated around the world under different names. In the English-speaking world it was called the *Workers' International Relief* (WIR); in the USA and Canada, it functioned first under the name of *Friends of Soviet Russia* before being re-named the WIR; in the French-speaking world it was called the *Secours Ouvrier International* (SOI), in Spain it was called the *Socorro Obrero Internacional*; in the Netherlands it was named the *Internationale Arbeiders Hulp*; in Romania the *Ajutorului Muncitoresc International*, in Sweden it was known as the *Internationella Arbetarhjälpen*, in Mexico it operated under the name of *Ayuda Internacional Obrera*, while in the Soviet Union it was known as the *Mezhdunarodnaia organizatsiia rabochei pomoshchi* (Mezhrabpom).⁴

3 Aus den Mitteilungen des Landeskriminalpolizeiamts (1) Berlin, 15.12.1931, Nr. 24. BArch, R 1501/20685, 164; Protocol: Weltkongress – Eröffnungssitzung, 10.10.1931, RGASPI 538/1/8, 1–2. For earlier studies on Münzenberg see especially, Babette Gross, *Willi Münzenberg. Eine politische Biographie. Mit einem Vorwort von Arthur Koestler* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1967); Helmut Gruber, "Willi Münzenberg's German Communist Propaganda Empire 1921–1933", *Journal of Modern History* 38: 3 (1966), pp. 278–297; Bernhard H. Bayerlein et al., "Research on Willi Münzenberg (1889–1940). Life, activities and solidarity networks. A bibliography", *International Newsletter of Communist Studies* XVIII:25 (2012). For the most recent comprehensive study of the IAH, see Kasper Braskén, *The International Workers' Relief, Communism, and Transnational Solidarity. Willi Münzenberg in Weimar Germany* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

4 See the various names of the national committees on IAH letterheads mentioned below, and in Willi Münzenberg, *Solidarität. Zehn Jahre Internationale Arbeiterhilfe 1921–1931* (Berlin: Neuer Deutscher Verlag, 1931).

This chapter seeks to analyse the IAH's global agenda, and it will argue that the IAH constitutes a significant case study of an international organisation during the inter-war period which had unparalleled prospects to develop new global transnational networks and identifications. However, the IAH never promoted ideas of universal solidarity that would include everyone, but was conceptualised within the framework of a radical international solidarity of the oppressed.⁵

The global elements of the IAH will be divided into two distinct sections: firstly, the global imaginary that was articulated during the IAH's international solidarity campaigns and, secondly, the IAH's structure and geographical expansion, or network. How was the IAH developed into an international organisation that strove to establish a global network of radicals and progressive intellectuals subscribing to the idea of international proletarian solidarity? To what extent were IAH national sections and bureaus created all around the world? What was the IAH's global agenda?

Radical, Transnational, Global

Besides the quest to transform the IAH into a global international organisation, its global outlook entailed the creation and realisation of a completely new global imaginary during the inter-war era. One could argue that the global imaginary provided by the IAH had already from 1921 inspired European, North and Latin American, Australian, South African and Chinese workers to start "thinking globally". Although the mass activities of the IAH were mainly centred to Germany and the North Atlantic world, it made one of the first efforts to bring representatives from all parts of the world together in a transnational co-operation despite being obstructed by European governments and the European global empires that deemed it as a network used for subversive and treacherous activities. In most cases the IAH's international solidarity campaigns were directed against atrocities, oppression and social misery caused by global forces and powers such as imperialism, international capitalism and extraordinary natural calamities that most often hit the poorest in society

5 For a framework of internationalism in the trade union movement, see Marcel van den Linden, "Gewerkschaftsbewegung und Globalisierung", in Sebastian Voigt and Heinz Sünker (eds.) *Arbeiterbewegung–Nation–Globalisierung. Bestandsaufnahmen einer alten Debatte* (Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft, 2014), pp. 19–45; and, Sigrid Koch-Baumgarten, *Gewerkschaftsinternationalismus und die Herausforderung der Globalisierung. Das Beispiel der Internationalen Transportarbeiterföderation* (Frankfurt a/M: Campus Verlag, 1999).

hardest. Most significantly, the IAH's activities encompassed the turning of seemingly local, regional or national social conflicts, strikes or humanitarian crises into global affairs, demanding the response of the workers of the world.⁶

Previous research has highlighted that the Comintern was one of the few international organisations that managed to establish a global network during the inter-war era. The Comintern has hence been described as the first international organisation in modern history committed to helping the working class with both global objectives and the global means to pursue them on five continents.⁷ As the IAH was closely connected to the Comintern, it benefitted immensely from its global connections, but it must further be highlighted that the IAH also functioned as a channel through which the Comintern aimed to expand its international network and influence with its solidarity campaigns and international publications.

The international character of the IAH and its development of global ambitions fits badly into the traditional chronology and definitions of international organisations, although in several ways it could be perceived as a predecessor to contemporary NGOs and solidarity networks. The Comintern, on the other hand, classified the IAH in 1926 as part of its system of Communist organisations that functioned as "sympathising mass organisation for special purposes". The IAH's specific objective was to function as an international solidarity organisation and to spread the idea of international solidarity around the world. However, it was only in a few countries that the IAH could actively be developed into a so-called mass organisation, which leaves this definition somewhat wanting. In its publications, the IAH itself used a number of definitions, including "relief organisation of the working class", "world organisation of proletarian solidarity" and "non-party mass organisation".⁸

6 For the most recent and comprehensive bibliography for earlier studies of the IAH see: Bayerlein et al., "Research on Willi Münzenberg (1889–1940)", pp. 104–122.

7 Milorad M. Drachkovitch and Branko Lazitch, "The Communist International", in Milorad M. Drachkovitch (ed.), *The Revolutionary Internationals, 1864–1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 195. See further on the Comintern in Alexander Vatin, *Die Komintern. Gründung, Programmatik, Akteure, Geschichte des Kommunismus und Linkssozialismus* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2009); Mikhail Narinsky and Jürgen Rojahn (eds.), *Centre and Periphery. The history of the Comintern in the light of new documents* (Amsterdam: International Institute of Social History, 1996); Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern. A history of international communism from Lenin to Stalin* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996); and Silvio Pons, *The Global Revolution. A History of International Communism 1917–1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

8 See further in Braskén, *The International Workers' Relief, Communism, and Transnational Solidarity*.

Later, during the Cold War era and up until quite recently, the IAH has mainly been classified as a “Communist front organisation”. However, the Cold-War-era front organisation perspective is rather a one-sided category that exclusively portrays the IAH’s message of international solidarity as having been a weapon skilfully utilised by the Soviet Union and the Bolsheviks. Nevertheless, international solidarity was not only a matter of Soviet state politics but, within the various national contexts, constituted one part of an alternative global culture, community and identification. Even though the IAH was part of the Communist movement, it was not involved in instigating revolutions, but was rather concerned with creating, re-articulating and maintaining the basic idea of international solidarity within the international working class and amongst its sympathisers. Most certainly it forwarded ideas of revolutionary social change, the abandonment of capitalism and imperialism, and expressed great admiration for the Soviet Union. These sentiments marked the organisation in the eyes of most state authorities and the police forces as an institution disseminating Bolshevik propaganda. But making revolutions per se was never its main purpose. It was instead described as being the supporting column of the working class, dedicated to keeping the workers strong, vibrant, and able to struggle if and when the time for world war and social revolution arrived. The IAH’s main slogan “solidarity will free the world” symptomatically promoted a belief in the historic mission of the working class to save the world from the perceived corrupt capitalist system of oppression.⁹ In this spirit, Münzenberg stated in one of his speeches at the IAH’s World Congress in 1931 that “We are not only the proletariat, with us rises the whole of humanity, only through us it is possible to shape a new culture and higher world order”.¹⁰

In conclusion, due to the IAH’s close connections to the Comintern and the Soviet Union, it cannot exactly be perceived as having been an INGO, nor can it be defined as having been a governmental, or inter-state organisation. The definition of the IAH endorsed here is thus an international organisation for

9 The IAH’s slogan was, for example, printed on the cover of the IAH’s German membership books: “Die Solidarität hilft die Welt befreien”, SAPMO – BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/16, 127. On Cold War deliberations on “communist front organisations” see Witold S. Sworakowski, *The Communist International and its Front Organizations. A research guide and checklist of holdings in American and European libraries*, Hoover Institution bibliographical series (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, 1965); Bernard S. Morris, “Communist International Front Organizations. Their nature and function”, *World Politics* 9: 1 (1956); James David Atkinson, *The Politics of Struggle. The communist front and political warfare* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1966).

10 Speech by Münzenberg, Minutes: Weltkongress 1. Tag Nachmittag, RGASPI 538/1/8, 67.

radical international solidarity, as this highlights the IAH's transnational character and emphasises its main mission as defined by the Comintern: to spread the idea of international solidarity to all corners of the world.

The global imaginaries of both the Socialist and Communist movements form a troublesome area within the previous research. Steger (2008) simply defines the "internationalist dreams" of Soviet Communism against the backdrop of the failed revolutions and insurrections in Europe after the First World War. Stalin's redefinition of internationalism to building "Socialism in one country" in the mid-1920s signifies, in Steger's presentation, the final "nationalisation of internationalism", and the turn of Communism towards totalitarian rule, comparable to National Socialism.¹¹ It has thus been argued that the policy of "Socialism in one country" transformed the working class project into one securing Soviet power, and changed international solidarity into swearing allegiance to the Soviet state.¹² However, in a significant contribution to the history of inter-war Communism, Hermann Weber points out that when world Communism was created through the establishment of the Comintern in 1919, the movement was not yet either monolithic or strictly organised through a central organisation. The majority of the members and functionaries of the national Communist parties were in fact furthering the traditions of Socialism, emphasising the struggle for social justice and solidarity, and had not yet been transformed into Stalinist cadres.¹³

Until the First World War, the Social Democratic organisations had comprised the major counter-cultural movement in Europe, but through their ascent to power for example in Germany, the incentive to maintain counter-cultural activities radically diminished. In Germany, at least, Social Democratic organisations were transformed into forces for national integration, instead of strongly articulating an international working-class solidarity.¹⁴ According

11 Manfred B. Steger, *The Rise of the Global Imaginary. Political ideologies from the French revolution to the global war on terror* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 105–113.

12 Michael Forman, *Nationalism and the International Labour Movement. The idea of the nation in Socialist and anarchist theory* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), pp. 120–121, 139; Miklós Molnár, "Internationalism", in C.D. Kernig (ed.), *Marxism, Communism and Western Society. A comparative encyclopedia* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 339.

13 Hermann Weber, "Zur Rolle des Terrors im Kommunismus", in Hermann Weber & Ulrich Mähler (eds.), *Verbrechen im Namen der Idee. Terror im Kommunismus 1936–38* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlagsgruppe, 2007), pp. 14–15, 38–39.

14 Hartmann Wunderer, "Noch einmal: Niedergang der Klassenkultur oder solidariegemeinschaftlicher Höhepunkt? Anmerkungen zu einem Beitrag von Peter Lösche und Franz Walter in GG 15, 1989, pp. 511–536", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 18:1 (1992), pp. 89–93.

to Eric D. Weitz, it was primarily the Communists who upheld inherited ideas from the nineteenth century Socialist movement which, by tradition, gave prominence to the struggle by the various labour movements against oppression in the name of working class solidarity.¹⁵

Although the idea of international solidarity was an integral part of the German Communist Party during the Weimar years, I would like to argue here that this notion of internationalism was mainly implemented within a German national framework: The KPD was a national party and hence primarily concerned with issues concerning a German revolution and the establishment of a "Soviet Germany". So, although the national Communist Parties embraced the idea of international solidarity and internationalism and demonstrated their solidarity to workers in other countries at rallies and demonstrations, it was not their business to interfere in affairs beyond their national context or to co-ordinate international solidarity campaigns. The international agenda of Communism was confined within the exclusive jurisdiction of the Comintern which had provided a mandate to the international organisations of radical solidarity like the IAH to act on the international global stage.¹⁶

Global Transfers of Solidarity

One can argue that the IAH was deeply engaged in creating a new global culture of international solidarity which was integrally connected to what Eric D. Weitz calls "the greatest transformation of media culture since Johannes Gutenberg".¹⁷ The IAH was supremely adept at taking advantage of and

15 Eric D. Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890–1990. From popular protests to socialist state* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 233, 270–271.

16 Classic studies on workers' culture include: W.L. Guttsman, *Workers' Culture in Weimar Germany. Between tradition and commitment* (New York: Berg Publishers Limited, 1990); Gerhard A. Ritter, "Workers' Culture in Imperial Germany. Problems and points of departure for research", *Journal of Contemporary History* 13(1978); Hartmann Wunderer, *Arbeitervereine und Arbeiterparteien. Kultur- und Massenorganisationen in der Arbeiterbewegung (1890–1933)* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 1980).

17 Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany. Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 247. See also Karl Christian Führer and Corey Ross (eds.), *Mass Media, Culture and Society in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Corey Ross, *Media and the Making of Modern Germany. Mass Communications, Society, and Politics from the Empire to the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Ute Daniel et al. (eds.), *Politische Kultur und Medienwirklichkeiten in den 1920er Jahren* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2010).

mastering the new mediums of the mass media, including pictorial newspapers, cinema and the extensive use of art and photomontage in its publications.

From its very inception in 1921, illustrated publications played a key role in the IAH's ability to both convey and empower its message of international solidarity.¹⁸ This was the beginning of an unprecedented revolution in illustrated products that would result in the publication of pictorial newspapers and journals such as *Sowjetrussland im Bild*, *Sichel und Hammer*, *AIZ*, *Eulenspiegel*, *Mahnruf: Organ für Internationale Solidarität*, and *Der Weg der Frau*. The majority of the IAH's publications were in German, but it also published illustrated brochures, journals and bulletins in languages such as Czechoslovakian, Dutch, French, English, Spanish, Russian, Swedish, Norwegian, Romanian and Chinese.¹⁹

The IAH utilised innovative forms and means to convey its articulations of radical international solidarity to the masses of Germany, across borders and through its global network. In one illustration, published in the *AIZ* in 1931, the newspaper's vast expansion and global spread is emphasised and its role as a global actor is highlighted. It shows how "the whole world" is reading the *AIZ*, including cities such as Sydney, Canton, Tokyo, Omsk, Bukhara, Montevideo, Los Angeles, Detroit, Chicago, New York and Toronto. However, the main readership of the IAH's publications was located within the German-speaking world (see Figure 3.1).²⁰ It is indeed very difficult to assess the *AIZ*'s global influence, and although its mass circulation beyond the German speaking world was limited, it most certainly influenced other left wing publishers around the world to imitate its methods to spread the message of radical international solidarity and to produce similar products for their local and national needs. In this sense the *AIZ*'s role as a forerunner and inspiration for an anti-bourgeoisie, anti-capitalist and anti-fascist press must be regarded exceptionally strong.

The IAH's unprecedented success seems clear as, for example, Iosif Piatnizki, one of the chief leaders of the Comintern, regarded the official Communist press as being "very boring" [*sehr langweilig*], which no-one outside the Party wished to purchase, whereas the IAH's publications were immensely popular

18 Willi Münzenberg, "Die Propaganda für die Hungerhilfe durch das Bild", *Inprekorr* 10 (1922), 84–85.

19 On the German journals and publications by the IAH, see further: Rolf Surmann, *Die Münzenberg-Legende. Zur Publizistik der revolutionären deutschen Arbeiterbewegung 1921–1933* (Köln: Prometh Verlag, 1983). A limited selection of the IAH's international publications can be found in the RGASPI fonds 538/2 and 538/3. See also a list of titles in Münzenberg, *Solidarität*, p. 527.

20 "Das Wachstum der *AIZ*", *AIZ* 41 (1931).



FIGURE 3.1 *The global outreach of the Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung (AIZ), as it was showcased to its readers*

Note: The illustration shows how the global network of the illustrated newspaper was used to strengthen the image of a growing global readership and a global network of supporters of the AIZ's message of radical international solidarity

SOURCE: ARBEITER-ILLUSTRIERTE-ZEITUNG NR. 41 (1931).

amongst the masses. The AIZ in particular quickly earned its place in the annals of media history as the first major anti-bourgeoise and anti-capitalist pictorial newspaper regularly featuring visionary photomontages by John Heartfield. It was immensely popular, both in Germany and internationally, reaching a print run of 500,000 copies in the early 1930s.²¹ It specifically ran

21 Siegfried Bahne, "Willi Münzenberg (1889–1940)", in Heinz-Dietrich Fischer (ed.), *Deutsche Presseverleger des 18. bis 20. Jahrhunderts* (München: Verlag Dokumentation, 1975), p. 341. On the IAH's work on film see Günter Agde and Alexander Schwarz (eds.), *Die rote Traumfabrik. Meshrabpom-Film und Prometheus 1921–1936* (Berlin: Bertz + Fischer Verlag, 2012); Vance Kepley, "The Worker's International Relief and the Cinema of the Left, 1921–1935", *Cinema Journal* 23:1 (1983), pp. 7–23; and Braskén, *The International Workers' Relief, Communism and Transnational Solidarity*, pp. 162–176; On the AIZ and John Heartfield see David Evans, *John Heartfield. AIZ/vi 1930–38* (New York: Kent Fine Art, 1991); Cristina Cuevas-Wolf, "Montage as a Weapon. The tactical alliance between Willi Münzenberg and John Heartfield", *New German Critique* 36:2 (2009), pp. 185–205; Wieland Herzfelde, *John Heartfield. Leben und Werk dargestellt von seinem Bruder*, 2 ed. (Dresden: VEB

articles on campaigns that emphasised the global character of radical international solidarity. On its cover, it highlighted such themes as the colonial liberation struggle, the “Negro question” in America, the revolution in China, the war in the Far East, and the war in Abyssinia (Ethiopia).²² It thus could highlight specific forms of internationalism, such as Black internationalism or Chinese internationalism as integrated parts of its articulations of radical international solidarity.²³

In addition to its media coverage, the IAH was actively engaged in organising international solidarity events which formed the basis of its international solidarity campaign work and its global imaginary. These solidarity events must be perceived as having been crucial in the IAH’s efforts to both energise and give meaning to the idea of radical international solidarity amongst workers in various countries. These events were always organised in connection with current solidarity campaigns, and included solidarity matinées, congresses, conferences, public lectures, rallies, performances by agitprop theatre groups and proletarian cinema evenings, all accompanied by the IAH’s fund-raising drives for current solidarity campaigns. The ability to organise such events was naturally restricted by various circumstances within different countries. In some areas, the IAH functioned more or less illegally, in others as an openly active public organisation. It was, however, particularly in Germany that the IAH developed into a notable membership organisation. It even developed separate sections for women and youth, and it was engaged in organising summer camps and orphanages for workers’ children, as well as the transportation of German children to neighbouring countries. The IAH was in fact involved in forming

Verlag der Kunst, 1971); and Anthony Coles, *John Heartfield. Ein politisches Leben* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2014).

- 22 Examples of headlines on *AIZ* covers: Der Kampf um das Erdöl und um die Welt, *AIZ*, October (1925); Der Freiheitskampf der Kolonialvölker, *AIZ* December (1925); Die Negerfrage in Amerika, *AIZ* January (1926); Chinas Befreiungskampf *AIZ* 7 (22.4.1926); Nie wieder Kolonialgreuel, *AIZ* 6 (9.2.1927); Chinas Freiheitskampf dauert fort!, *AIZ* 17 (1.5.1927); Sondernummer: Leben und Kampf der Schwarzen Rasse, *AIZ* 26 (1931); Krieg im Fernen Osten!, *AIZ* 46 (1931); Sondernummer: Kriegsherd Ferner Osten, *AIZ* 15 (12.4.1934); Krieg in Arabien, *AIZ* 23 (7.6.1934); Kriegsschauplatz Abessinien, *AIZ* 8 (21.2.1935).
- 23 See further on Black and Chinese internationalisms in David Featherstone, “Black Internationalism, Subaltern Cosmopolitanism, and the Spatial Politics of Antifascism”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 103:6 (2013), pp. 1406–1420; Holger Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic. African American Agency, West African Intellectuals and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); and Gregor Benton, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism. Forgotten Histories, 1917–1945* (London: Routledge, 2007).

a whole solidarity experience, which included all aspects of life. The IAH provided strike support and education during work time; it was involved in family affairs, sexual consultation, child nurturing, and engaged itself in women's issues such as fighting against the notorious Section 218 (or § 218) which criminalised abortion in Weimar Germany; it organised activities during leisure and free time, such as producing proletarian literature through its own publishing house called the Neuer Deutscher Verlag (NDV) and offered membership to its proletarian book club called the Universum Bücherei. The IAH also organised cinema evenings, public meetings and seminars on the current state of the working class. From 1929, the IAH organised an annual International Solidarity Day which offered the opportunity to publicly celebrate international solidarity. All these events articulated a radical international solidarity of the oppressed but also promoted an uncritical admiration for the Soviet Union, Lenin and Stalin.²⁴

Articulating a positive image of the Soviet Union was important but, as the German Communist Clara Zetkin (1857–1933), who was closely associated with the IAH's work, stated in her private correspondence, the IAH's principal mission was to emphasise to the workers, both men and women, the fact that, irrespective of their occupation, nationality, race, gender or religion they were united by their international class solidarity: It was a unity of destiny, a community tied together by fate that should initiate a united struggle against their oppressors.²⁵

In subsequent paragraphs, a selection of the IAH's international solidarity campaigns will be analysed, followed by an outline of the IAH's global network. Due to the current state of research, where the IAH's activities within the various national sections remains largely uncharted territory, the main framework for this analysis of the IAH's campaigns for international solidarity will be set within the context of Berlin and Weimar Germany.²⁶ For the geographies of left wing internationalism during the interwar period the article

24 For the only comprehensive albeit biased overview of the IAH's international activities see: Münzenberg, *Solidarität*. A critical assessment of the IAH is provided in a letter from Dimitrov to Münzenberg, [Berlin] 26.10.1931, RGASPI 499/1/33, 129. See also Heinz Lorenz, *Die Universum-Bücherei 1926–1939. Geschichte und Bibliographie einer proletarischen Buchgemeinschaft* (Berlin: Antiquariat und Verlag Elvira Tasbach, 1996). See also Braskén, *The International Workers' Relief, Communism, and Transnational Solidarity*.

25 Clara Zetkin, Bemerkungen zum Broschürenentwurf von Trude Hölz [no date], RGASPI 528/1/1879, 1.

26 On the IAH in Sweden see Fredrik Petersson, "Proletariatets proviantkolonn": Internationella arbetarhjälpen i Sverige", *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland* 94:2 (2009), pp. 220–247.

makes a strong argument for the primacy of Berlin (1921–1933) as a global hub for radical international solidarity articulations that in many ways surpassed and equalled the importance of Moscow due to its location between Western and Eastern Europe. Berlin became a scene where influences from the Comintern in Moscow, the Soviet Union, the international communist movement and especially the German Communist Party, and representatives from the colonial world found a meeting place where the voices of the oppressed from various parts of the world could be heard and brought to the attention of a vast European public. The geographies of internationalism remained uneven, however, and German, European, Soviet and North Atlantic themes still dominated the activities, which provided the IAH's global ambitions a distinct character. Among the “colonial” voices again, an uneven geographical focus of radical international solidarity was often a fact where for example China played an unparalleled role in the global construction of radical solidarity articulations.²⁷ However, as it will be shown in the end of the chapter, although the campaigns for radical international solidarity were engaged more intensely with certain parts of the world the ability to show proof of a truly global mobilisation of support through the IAH's networks became the strongest way to empower the IAH's global imaginary as the IAH could take credit for “awakening” radical international solidarity in all corners of the world.²⁸

Campaigns for Radical International Solidarity, 1921–1935

In the summer of 1921, a devastating famine hit Soviet Russia and it desperately appealed for assistance from Western governments and the workers of the world. The main organisers behind the famine relief from the workers in the West were the International Trade Union Federation (ITFU, the Amsterdam International) and the *Auslandskomitee zur Organisation der Arbeiterhilfe für*

27 See further on the role of Berlin in Karl Schlögel. *Das russische Berlin. Ostbahnhof Europas*. (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2007); Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist, and Alexander M. Martin (eds.) *Fascination and Enmity. Russia and Germany as Entangled Histories, 1914–1945* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012). On the significance of China, see Kurt Tiedke (ed.), *Aus dem Kampf der deutschen Arbeiterklasse zur Verteidigung der Revolution in China. Eine Auswahl von Dokumenten und Materialien aus den Jahren 1925–1933* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1959).

28 For a discussion on the geographies of internationalism see especially, David Featherstone, *Solidarity. Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism* (London: Zed Books, 2012).

die Hungernden in Russland (Foreign Committee for the Organising of Workers' Relief for the Starving in Russia), later in 1923 to be renamed the IAH. Whereas the IFTU gained the support of the Social Democrats and trade unionists, the IAH managed to gain, in addition to the support of the Communists, the support of many prominent Left-leaning intellectuals, artists and "unorganised" workers. Amongst the earliest supporters of the IAH were such renowned names as Albert Einstein, Käthe Kollwitz, Georg Grosz, Anatole France, Henri Barbusse, Bernhard Shaw and Andersen Nexø.²⁹

Münzenberg later stated that the IAH had, despite the divisions within the international solidarity campaign, collected goods, money and material assets for \$US 2.5 million. In total, the IAH managed to transport 30,000 tons of provisions and aid materials to Russia, according to Münzenberg.³⁰ The relative success of this international solidarity campaign in 1921 was explained by the power of solidarity: solidarity was defined as being an ever-present force within the working class, only waiting to be empowered, to be awakened, by a true cry for solidarity.³¹ However, although spontaneous responses to various crises were honoured, Münzenberg stressed from the very beginning the importance of having a meticulously-structured organisation. Only through the establishment of a solidly-founded and well run international organisation was it possible to effectively empower the message of international solidarity, he argued. The organisation represented a necessary intermediary between the providers and receivers of aid and relief within the transnational community of the oppressed.³²

During the solidarity campaign for the starving in Soviet Russia, the IAH's global outreach was realised through the creation of a transnational network connecting most distant parts of the world. When Münzenberg assessed the IAH's Soviet famine relief campaign in March 1922, he described it as being an international campaign that encompassed the whole world, "die ganze Erde umfassende internationale Aktion [...]".³³ In an appeal published by the IAH,

29 List of supporters printed in "Für die Hungernden in Rußland", Bulletin 8 (29.8.1921), RGASPI 538/2/6, 45; See also report by Münzenberg presented at the Comintern's Fourth World Congress in Moscow, 21.11.1922, RGASPI 491/1/151, 27–39.

30 Report by Münzenberg presented at the Comintern's Fourth World Congress in Moscow, 21.11.1922, RGASPI 491/1/151, 37–38.

31 Else Baum, "Die Hilfsaktion und die deutschen Kommunistinnen", *Inprekorr* 19 (1922), p. 154.

32 Münzenberg, "Der internationale Kampf der Proletarier gegen den Hunger in Rußland", Bulletin 3 (19.8.1921), RGASPI 538/2/6, 12–13.

33 Nicht zu veröffentlichen! Erweiterte Exekutive-Sitzung. III Internationale, 14. Sitzung, 1.3.1922 (Abendsitzung), RGASPI 495/159/35, 5–6.

it was claimed that the IAH was in fact setting new standards for international solidarity. In it, the IAH boasted:

Soon almost a year has passed since the first cry for help from the workers and peasants of Soviet Russia reached the European and American proletariat. In this year, a chain of proletarian solidarity has been forged, spanning the whole world from Europe to Australia and from South Africa to Iceland. Never before have so many people participated in a proletarian relief action.³⁴

This articulation of a global solidarity movement was used by the IAH to prove the power of solidarity as it had been realised globally, despite the ongoing oppression and poverty of the workers' of the world. When analysing the IAH's message of solidarity, one of the central pillars of its narrative was that solidarity was always fought heroically against all odds. Solidarity was about struggling to win the unwinnable, it was the community of the despairing who were connected through the idea and practice of solidarity. There was still, however, always a distinction between those in desperate need who were dependent on solidarity, and those who were the agents of this solidarity and who had the possibility to empower the rhetoric of solidarity through practical solidarity work.³⁵

The IAH's first campaign organised for a non-European country was in aid of the victims of the Great Kanto earthquake in Japan which devastated the Tokyo area on 1 September 1923 and resulted in over 100,000 casualties. When Münzenberg travelled to Moscow in mid-September 1923, he was put in charge of organising a relief campaign for the Japanese victims. In a letter sent on 20 September, he suggested to Zinoviev, the Chairman of the Comintern, that the Japanese relief campaign could, through the support of such personalities as

34 "Schon ist fast ein Jahr vergangen, seit der erste Hilferuf der hungernden Arbeiter und Bauern Sowjetrußlands das Proletariat Europas und Amerikas erreichte. Während dieses Jahres wurde eine Kette proletarischer Solidarität geschmiedet, welche die ganze Welt von Europa bis Australien und von Südafrika bis Island umspannt. Nie vorher haben so große Massen an einer proletarischen Hilfsaktion teilgenommen", quoted from "An die Werktätigen aller Länder! Aufruf des III. Weltkongresses der IAH", Bulletin 43 (21.7.1922), SAPMO – BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/1, 279. The role of international organisations as "brokers" has been highlighted for example in the workshop "Brokers of Aid. Humanitarian Organizations between Donors and Recipients", organised by the Research Project "The Moral Economy of Global Civil Society: A History of Voluntary Food Aid" at Södertörn University, Institute of Contemporary History Stockholm, 12–13 June 2014.

35 Bulletin 43 (21.7.1922), SAPMO – BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/1, 279.

Käthe Kollwitz and Albert Einstein, encompass not merely the sending of provisions to Japan, but the sending of people as well.³⁶ On 28 September, the IAH had a meeting with representatives of the Comintern's Eastern Bureau (Ost-bureau) regarding the setting up of a committee for relief to Japan.³⁷ A couple of days later, on 1 October, the Comintern assigned to Münzenberg the job of sending a letter to all Central Committees of the Communist Parties regarding the IAH's forthcoming campaign for the Japanese peasants and workers.³⁸ Münzenberg's letter, penned on 3 October 1923 in Moscow, constituted in effect the beginning of the IAH's engagement in East Asia, and the launch of a completely new kind of international solidarity campaign both in Europe and throughout the world. Münzenberg explained in his letter to the world's Communist Parties that the Japanese working class and small peasant victims of the earthquake had received no assistance from the Japanese government. The Japanese trade unions had allegedly sent an appeal to the workers of the world in which they had pleaded for urgent assistance, thus locating the origins of the campaign in Japan and framing the IAH's appeal as a response to a call for solidarity "from below".³⁹ The earthquake had resulted in a declaration of Martial Law in Japan, and a wave of repression against anyone suspected of threatening the public order had been initiated. After the earthquake, Japanese Communists and labour activists were especially targeted by governmental forces. As a result of this governmental action, the IAH was unable at the time to establish a legal bureau in Japan and the base for the campaign was, therefore, transferred to Shanghai in China, which was the nearest "open" port to Japan as well as being the Comintern's operational base in Asia.⁴⁰

The Comintern was not to have any official connection with this campaign, which was to be led by the IAH in Berlin. As Münzenberg explained, the launch of this campaign had already experienced a two-week delay, and a rapid mobilisation of the relief campaign was, therefore, required. In order to make the

36 Letter from Münzenberg to Zinoviev, 20.9.1923, RGASPI 538/2/19, 124.

37 Protokoll der Sitzung zwischen Vertreter der IAH und dem Ostbureau der Komintern am 28.9.1923 zum Zwecks der Gründung eines Komitees Japan-hilfe, RGASPI 534/3/53.

38 Even before Münzenberg's return from Moscow, the IAH in Berlin had made significant preparations for the campaign. See "I. Bericht über die vor Eintreffen des Genossen Münzenberg in Berlin unternommenen Schritte in der Japan – Hilfsaktion", early October 1923, RGASPI 538/2/19, 223–224.

39 "An alle kommunistischen Parteien", appeal written by Münzenberg, 3.10.1923, RGASPI 495/18/173, 230.

40 On the revolutionary role of Shanghai, see Marie-Claire Bergère, *Shanghai. China's Gateway to Modernity*. Translated by Janet Lloyd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 177–212.

world's radicals realise the significance of sending clothes and foodstuffs to Japan, Münzenberg finished by stressing the "immense political significance" of the campaign. For the first time, a unique opportunity had emerged to demonstrate to the wider Japanese population the "actual meaning" of a strong and capable workers' international through practical work.⁴¹

Finally, on 20 October 1923, the IAH published its first *Bulletin for Japan* that aimed to kick-start the relief campaign for Japan. However, due to the simultaneous worsening social crisis in Germany, the IAH's solidarity campaign for Japan was called off, on Münzenberg's suggestion, on 24 October. Thus, the IAH's initial venture in Asia was almost over before it had even started.⁴² However, although the campaign for Japan was called off in Central Europe, Münzenberg reported later in November to Piatnizki that the IAH from Berlin had managed to co-ordinate relief campaigns for Japan in Yugoslavia, Britain, the USA and Argentina.⁴³

As an example of the collaboration between the IAH and the Comintern during the preparation of the Japan relief campaign, on 4 October 1923 the IAH requested that the Russian Comintern emissary Grigori Voitinsky (1893–1953) be freed from his duties for two months in order to lead a bureau in Shanghai. Voitinsky had, since 1920, been assigned to work for the Comintern in the Far East with his operational base in China, where he had made contact with both Sun Yat-sen and Communist militants in both Beijing and Shanghai. The move to start such a bureau was approved by the Comintern but, instead of Voitinsky, a certain comrade "Feinberg" was put in charge of this bureau. The IAH then sent as its delegate to Shanghai the German Communist Rudolf Rothkegel (1889–1964).⁴⁴

41 RGASPI 495/18/173, 230.

42 A copy of Bulletin der Japanhilfe-Komitees der Internationalen Arbeiterhilfe 1, 20.10.1923 is preserved in RGASPI 538/2/21, 35–36ob. According to the Bulletin, the IAH published its first appeal for Japan on 18.10.1923; Letter from Münzenberg to Zinoviev, 24.10.1923, SAPMO – BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/15, 188–188a; The grounds for this decision are clearly formulated in Willi Münzenberg, "Denkschrift über die Internationale Arbeiterhilfe. Überreicht am 30. Januar 1924 dem Chef der Heeresleitung", Berlin, 30.1.1924, SAPMO – BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/15, 84. See also the version presented in Münzenberg, *Solidarität*, pp. 235–238.

43 Letter from Münzenberg to Piatnizki, 22.11.1923, RGASPI 538/2/19, 174.

44 Auszüge aus den Protokollen d. Sitzungen d. Präsidiums des EKKI, Nr. 92, 4.10.1924, RGASPI 495/2/20, 6. During a Presidium meeting of the EKKI in Moscow, Sen Katayama reported on the Commission for Relief to Japan and requested financial support to form a bureau in Shanghai. See: Protokoll No. 36 der Sitzung des Präsidiums des EKKI, 13.10.1923, RGASPI 495/2/17, 184. On Voitinsky, see Branko Lazitch and Milorad M. Drachkovitch, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*. New, Revised and Expanded Edition (Stanford:

Rothkegel had been the leader of the local bureau of the IAH in Leningrad since 1921.⁴⁵ He was sent to Shanghai to organise the IAH's shipments of aid to Japan and to accompany them from Shanghai to Japan. He arrived in Shanghai probably sometime in October 1923, and in late 1923 he travelled to Beijing where he made contact with the Japanese legation and applied for a visa to enter Japan. His application was rejected, however, so he had to travel back to Shanghai empty-handed. As the German embassy in Tokyo had reported, the Japanese authorities in China suspected Rothkegel of being a "Bolshevik agent" and would, therefore, not allow him to enter Japan.⁴⁶ Not much practical work could be done for the Japanese workers as the IAH members were not permitted to enter the country. Delivering hunger relief and showing practical solidarity through illegal channels was simply an impossibility. However, according to the German IAH's official organ *Not und Brot*, later in 1924 an IAH committee was finally set up in Japan.⁴⁷

In October 1923, the impending financial, political and social collapse of the Weimar Republic inspired the IAH to instead organise a major international solidarity campaign for Germany. In Germany, the IAH was able to operate as a legal organisation and could publicly call for a global campaign to help Germans in despair. For example, the IAH published an appeal "To the working masses of the whole world!" where in a dramatic tone it called upon the international solidarity of the workers of the world.⁴⁸ However, if the IAH had

Hoover Institution Press, 1986), pp. 497–498. Comrade "Feinberg" was most likely Iosif Fineberg (1886–1957), who worked at Comintern headquarters until 1931. See further Lazitch and Drachkovitch, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, p. 188.

45 In Rothkegel's short biography there is no mention of his trip to Shanghai. See Weber and Herbst, *Deutsche Kommunisten*, pp. 750–751.

46 Letter from the Russian bureau of the Arbeiterhilfe, signed by Missiano and Oehring, to the Ostabteilung der Komintern, Voitinsky, 7.2.1924, RGASPI 514/1/81, 11; Letter from Trautmann at the Deutsche Botschaft, Tokio, 13.8.1924/21.5.1924 regarding "Deutsche Arbeiterspende für japanische erdbebengeschädigte Arbeiter", BArch, R 1501/113208, 181.

47 Telegram from Oehring to Rothkegel [addressed to Boarding House Bubbling Well Road, Shanghai], 10.1.1924, RGASPI 538/3/24, 13; Letter from Oehring to Rothkegel [addressed to 12 Kiangwan Road, Shanghai], 11.2.1924, RGASPI 538/3/24, 14; "Ein breites Komitee der IAH in Japan", *Not und Brot* 20 (10.4.1924).

48 On "German hunger" see *Hunger in Deutschland. Mit Beiträgen von Max Barthel, Mathilde Wurm, Heinrich Mann, Dr. Alfons Paquet, Arthur Holitscher, Willi Münzenberg, G.G.L. Alexander*, Zentralkomitee der Internationalen Arbeiterhilfe (ed.), (Berlin: 1923); and Willi Münzenberg, *Ursache, Größe und Bekämpfung der Hungersnot in Deutschland. Rede gehalten auf dem Weltkongress der IAH in Berlin am 9. Dezember 1923* (Berlin: Zentralkomitee der Internationalen Arbeiterhilfe, 1923).

previously focused on one major campaign at a time, a significant turn took place at the end of 1924 when the IAH was turned into a permanent international solidarity organisation. On 1 December 1924, the Orgbüro of the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) gave the IAH the mandate to organise solidarity campaigns in China, in Japan and in the colonial countries where the masses had not yet reached class consciousness but were engaged in national liberation struggles against European and American imperialism. The IAH was authorised to organise campaigns to express solidarity for those hit by natural calamities and who were facing extreme mass deprivations. The aim of the IAH's campaigns was to collect and send material assistance and commence campaigns elaborating on the international solidarity between the workers of the world and the nationally oppressed peoples in the colonial countries.⁴⁹

The IAH's mission was to convince the masses in the colonial countries that the workers in Europe and America did not support their "imperialist" masters. According to directives from the Comintern, it was of the outmost importance to prove that bonds of solidarity did not exist between Europeans or Americans in general, but that the Western working class and the oppressed peoples in the colonial countries were "natural allies" [natürliche Bundesgenossen].⁵⁰

From then onwards, wherever in the world there was a major strike, struggle or natural calamity, the IAH would launch an international solidarity campaign. In 1924 the IAH was thus involved in campaigns taking place, amongst others, in Australia, Argentina, Mexico and China. The following year, solidarity campaigns were launched in India, Hungary, Ireland and in France where it was involved in the campaign against the French war in Morocco. These solidarity campaigns represented something completely new, as they were campaigns supported by German, European and American workers in order to assist the "oppressed and exploited" peoples of the world, thus embracing a rising global imaginary, where Berlin formed the global meeting point of solidarity articulations coming from East to West and from North to South.⁵¹

49 Richtlinien für die gegenseitigen Beziehungen der IAH und IRH (Angenommen in der Sitzung des Sekretariats vom 1.12.1924), RGASPI 495/18/253, 4–5. For the Comintern's involvement in the colonial question, see Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism. An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

50 RGASPI 495/18/253, 5.

51 On the IAH's international activities see, for example, "Die IAH für die Opfer der Überschwemmung in China", *Not und Brot. Organ der Internationalen Arbeiterhilfe* 33 (30.9.1924), BArch, R 1507/67232/530, 179a. "Die IAH-Bewegung in Australien geht vorwärts", *Not und Brot* 37 (15.12.1924); "Die Gewerkschaften und die IAH in Argentinien", *Not und Brot* 37 (15.12.1924); "Auch in Mexiko wird die IAH-Bewegung vorwärts getrieben", *Not*

The most prominent of these early international campaigns was the one organised for China. In September 1924 the IAH joined the Soviet anti-imperialist campaign "Hands off China". If the "imperialist countries" were the given enemies of China, the Soviet Union and the Communist movement were perceived as being the natural allies and protectors of China and of the peoples of Asia. On 30 May 1925, a significant movement was born in Shanghai as a Chinese demonstration was fired upon on orders from a British officer in front of a police station in the international settlement. The events of the 30 May gave birth to a protest movement which spread a wave of strikes and demonstrations to several of the treaty ports along the Chinese coast. This movement resulted in the first large-scale united protest of nationalists in revolt against foreign dominion on the one hand, and workers striking against their working conditions in the foreign-owned factories on the other. Due to the Comintern's and the IAH's global inter-connected networks, an international campaign would soon inspire European and American workers marching and demonstrating in the name of international solidarity, expressing their solidarity to the workers, students and peasants of China.⁵²

As a result, on 19 June 1925 the IAH launched a new bulletin called the *Bulletin für China / for China / pour la Chine* which heralded the beginning of the IAH's China campaign. The IAH assigned the workers of the world a grand mission: to hinder the imperialist powers in suppressing the striking Chinese workers. These were not some far away incidents, it was argued, but were events highly relevant for the workers of Germany, Europe and the rest of the world. Significantly, it was argued that it was their duty to assist the Chinese workers and peasants because their destiny was perceived as being intrinsically tied to the destiny of the workers of the West. The IAH's appeal was directed to all revolutionary workers, all friends of the struggling proletariat, and to all philanthropists [Menschenfreunde] who together could assist the very "existence,

und Brot 37 (15.12.1924); "Hungerkatastrophe in Irland", *Pressedienst der Internationalen Arbeiterhilfe*, Berlin, 10.2.1925, SAPMO-BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/15, 306; "Die Internationale Arbeiterhilfe mit den französischen Intellektuellen gegen den Marokkokrieg", *Bulletin der IAH-Hilfsaktion für China* 6 (15.7.1925), BArch, R 1507/1096f, 76c; "Die IAH für Ungarn – China – Indien" & "Die Hilfsaktion der IAH für Indien", *Bulletin der Internationalen Arbeiterhilfe* 3 (7.11.1925), BArch, R 1507/1096f, 228–230a.

52 Bergère, *Shanghai*, pp. 187–189; Elizabeth J. Perry, *Shanghai on Strike. The politics of Chinese labor* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 81–84; Dan N. Jacobs, "Soviet Russia and Chinese Nationalism in the 1920s", in F. Gilbert Chan and Thomas H. Etzold (eds.), *China in the 1920s. Nationalism and Revolution* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1976), pp. 47–48; and Michael Share, "Clash of Worlds. The Comintern, British Hong Kong and Chinese Nationalism, 1921–1927", *Europe – Asia Studies* 57:4 (2005), pp. 609–611.

human worth and national freedom” of the struggling workers, peasants and intellectuals of China.⁵³

The day after the IAH’s first *Bulletin for China* was published, Münzenberg sent a telegram to the Chinese government confirming that the IAH had initiated a relief campaign based on “heißeste Sympathie” (warmest sympathies) and practical solidarity. Another telegram had been sent to a strike committee in Shanghai stating that the fund-raising appeal for money, clothes and provisions had commenced. “Hold out, brotherly aid is underway”, the IAH’s telegram promised.⁵⁴ In the spirit of solidarity, the Chinese representatives of the newly-established IAH bureau in Beijing wrote an official telegram to Münzenberg stating that:

[t]he sharper the struggle, the stronger our conviction that success for struggle [sic] to Chinese liberation depends upon practical solidarity of Western working class. Long live the alliance of Western exploited with Eastern suppressed workers.⁵⁵

Such “confirmations” of the Chinese’ belief and trust in solidarity were used to empower the IAH’s articulations of radical international solidarity even further in the West. Münzenberg reported later in August to the Comintern that the IAH had by then organised over 1000 meetings with Chinese delegates in Germany, Europe and the USA. Münzenberg estimated that by mid-August 1925 about five million people had attended the IAH’s China meetings and demonstrations. The climax of the China campaign was the “Hands off China” Congress organised on 16 August 1925 in Berlin.⁵⁶

The colonial question continued thereafter to be of central interest for the IAH. In August 1925 the AIZ presented thorough reports on developments in

53 “Helft den Hungernden und streikenden Arbeitern Chinas”, *Bulletin der IAH-Hilfsaktion für China* 1 (19.6.1925), BArch, R 1507/1096f, 59. This appeal was signed by the executive committee of the IAH.

54 “Die Internationale Arbeiterhilfe an die Regierung in Peking”; and “Die IAH an das Streikkomitee in Shanghai”, both signed by the Central Committee of the Arbeiterhilfe and Münzenberg. *Bulletin der IAH-Hilfsaktion für China* 2 (23.6.1925), BArch, R 1507/1096f, 62.

55 Telegram from the Chinese WIR to Münzenberg; Beijing, 11.8.1925. It was signed by Yu yo Yen, Li yu ying, Georg Hsue, Kou Meng Yu, Chaoschiyen, Tangpe, Seal [original transcription of Chinese names], RGASPI 538/2/53, 12.

56 Letter from Münzenberg to Sinowiev, 18.8.1925, RGASPI 538/2/27, 108; ‘Einladung zu dem Kongress “Hände weg von China”’, Berlin, 1.8.1925. The invitation was signed by Münzenberg and Georg Ledebour, RGASPI 495/30/165, 72; Minutes of the “Hände weg von China!” Congress in Berlin, 16.8.1925, RGASPI 514/1/164, 49.

China and on the IAH's China campaign. The IAH's *Bulletin for China* and the *AIZ* also reprinted the IAH's first appeal that had been published in Chinese in Beijing. This appeal was signed by Henri Barbusse, Bernhard Shaw, Upton Sinclair, Clara Zetkin, Olga Kamenewa, Albert A. Purcell, Professor Auguste Forel, Edo Fimmen and Willi Münzenberg (see Figure 3.2).⁵⁷

In retrospect, the IAH's China campaign heralded the beginning of Münzenberg's engagement in the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggle, peaking in 1927 with the establishment of the League Against Imperialism (LAI) (see further in Chapter 5). Although the Comintern created the LAI in order to head the anti-imperialist struggle, anti-imperialism continued to be an essential part of the IAH's articulations of international solidarity.⁵⁸ The LAI was organisationally completely separated from the IAH, but Münzenberg's central role in both organisations made the networks and connections very strong. In many instances after 1927 the two organisations co-ordinated joint solidarity campaigns. The IAH's publishing house NDV and especially the *AIZ* and the *Mahnruf* were also very useful for the LAI as it provided the organisation with a broad publicity that would have been very difficult to reach if restricted to the LAI's own newspapers and bulletins. In fact a very fruitful cooperation was established between the IAH's publishing house and the various Comintern-affiliated organisations based in Germany, such as the LAI (see Chapter 5), the ISH (see Chapter 6), the ITUCNW (see Chapter 7), and even the International Red Aid (see Chapter 2), as the organisations in question provided global themes and issues for the *AIZ* to report about, while at the same time the *AIZ* provided these organisations with major publicity in Germany, Europe and beyond.⁵⁹ Another example of common campaigns was the use of the IAH's Moscow-based film production company Mezhrabpom-Film to popularise

57 "Die erste IAH-Aufruf chinesisch", *Bulletin der IAH-Hilfsaktion für China* 6, 15.7.1925, BArch, R 1507/1096f, 76a; "Hilfsaktion der IAH für die Streikenden in China", *AIZ* (August 1925), 15.

58 See further on the history of the LAI and its networks in Fredrik Petersson, "We are Neither Visionaries nor Utopian Dreamers! Willi Münzenberg, the League against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925–1933" (Åbo Akademi University, 2013) as well as Chapter 5 of this volume.

59 See for example the cover story on the LAI in "Gegen Koloniale Unterdrückung und Ausbeutung! Krieg dem imperialistischen Kriege!" *Mahnruf* 6/7 (July–August 1929); or *AIZ* 26 (1931): *Sondernummer: Leben und Kampf der Schwarzen Rasse*, containing the famous photomontage by John Heartfield depicting a black and a white arm with clenched fists with the motto: "Ob schwarz, ob weiss – im Kampf vereint"; on the IRA's Scottsboro campaign and Ada Wright in "Eine Mutter kämpft um Ihre Söhne", *AIZ* 21 (1932); or "Massenbündnis gegen imperialistischen Krieg in Amsterdam", *AIZ* 37 (11.9.1932).

anti-imperialist articulations in the West though cinematic experiences like *Storm over Asia* (1928), directed by Vsevolod Pudovkin.⁶⁰

After 1925, the IAH continued its international engagement primarily in the form of strike support and through a broad cultural work. Münzenberg characterised the mass strikes and lockouts that took place after the mid-1920s as being completely different compared to those in the early twentieth century. These new strikes were defined by Münzenberg as being struggles that involved workers in entire countries, and occasionally even the entire international working class. Workers in Europe and especially Germany were, in fact for the first time in history, actively engaged in strikes and social conflicts around the globe through the IAH's network and radical international solidarity articulations that most likely reached a very different circle of supporters than members of the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU or Profintern) that primarily supported striking "red" workers around the world.⁶¹

One of the most significant strikes supported by the IAH was the British miners' strike and general strike of 1926, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 4. By then, the IAH co-ordinated a well functioning international organisation and was thus able to respond very efficiently when news of significant struggles or disasters was received. In line with the IAH's articulations of radical international solidarity, it declared that the struggle of the British workers was likewise a struggle of the international class. The defeat of the British workers would be regarded as a defeat of the international working class, just as its victory would be a victory for the international proletariat.⁶² Symptomatic of the IAH's global ambitions, the British general strike was seen as an opportunity to activate the IAH's global network, as it publicly appealed for the prevention of shipments of coal to Great Britain, and for the spreading of the strike to the British colonies in order to weaken the British Empire. Hopes for solidarity strikes among the dockers in both the West and East Indies, among the miners

60 See further in Amy Sargeant, *Storm over Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

61 Willi Münzenberg, "Die Internationale Arbeiterhilfe und die Unterstützung von Massenstreiks und Wirtschaftskämpfen", *Die Internationale Gewerkschafts-Pressekorrespondenz* 67 (1931), BArch, R 1501/20685, 104–104a. Compared to trade union internationalism, regions like Asia, Africa and Latin America were not included until between the 1940s and 1960s, van den Linden, "Gewerkschaftsbewegung und Globalisierung", p. 37; on the RILU, see Reiner Tosstorff, *Profintern. Die Rote Gewerkschaftsinternationale 1920–1937* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004).

62 Circular 25 from "Bund der Freunde der IAH", Reichssekretariat, Dünninghaus, to "alle Landesausschüsse und selbständigen Unterbezirke", Berlin, 7.5.1926, SAPMO – BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/16, 24.

in Australia and “mutinies in Chinese waters” were, for example, expressed by the IAH.⁶³

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, the IAH launched campaigns for such causes as the textile workers’ strike in Gastonia (North and South Carolina, USA);⁶⁴ the major textile workers’ strike in Yorkshire in 1930;⁶⁵ and a textile workers’ strike in northern France in 1931.⁶⁶ The major event of 1931 was, however, the IAH’s ten-year anniversary celebration, which culminated in the “World Congress of International Solidarity”, organised in Berlin in October 1931 (see Figures 3.3 and 3.4).

Displays of international solidarity were popularly staged at various IAH events. During the 1931 World Congress, a display of fraternisation between the Chinese and Japanese delegations was staged despite the fact that their two countries were at war. On the suggestion of the Japanese delegation, representatives of the two countries walked to the tribune and declared both their “unbreakable solidarity” and their brotherly condemnation of Japanese imperialism and the terror of the Guomindang. In a historical parallel, the IAH’s newspaper *Welt am Abend* noted that several years earlier a similar scene between representatives of two war-ravaged countries had taken place at the international Socialist conference between Sen Katayama from Japan and Sergei Plechanov from Russia. Like at this 1904 international meeting in Amsterdam, the 1931 display of fraternity was used to show solidarity to the proletarian victims of the conflict and to stage a public assurance of the Japanese and Chinese peoples’ will to peace.⁶⁷ With the escalating situation in the Far East, and the deepening Manchurian crisis, the inclusion of China and Japan was all the more important for the articulations of radical international solidarity and the understanding of the geographies of internationalism as they had central symbolic meaning for the global imaginary of the IAH; China still represented

63 “Streikwirkungen in den Kolonien”, *Pressedienst der IAH zum englischen Bergarbeiterstreik*, Berlin, 11.5.1926, SAPMO – BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/15, 324.

64 Gastonia-Poetz: Willi Münzenberg, “Die Bluttaufer der amerikanischen IAH”, *Inprekorr* 90 (1929), 2169–2170; Erstes Protokoll der Untersuchungskomitees der Internationalen Arbeiterhilfe über die Vorgänge in Gastonia [1929], RGASPI 538/2/53, 12–13.

65 “Streik in Yorkshire. Aufruf zur solidarischen Unterstützung”, *Die Welt am Abend* 104 (8.5.1930).

66 “Der Streik der französischen Textilarbeiter. Solidaritäts-Kundgebung der IAH”, *Die Welt am Abend* 122 (29.5.1931).

67 “Der Siegeszug der IAH. Der Weltkongress diskutiert. Die Delegierten Chinas und Japans: Brüder, reicht euch die Hände...!” *Die Welt am Abend* 239, 13.10.1931, BArch, R 1501/20197, 100; Kevin J. Callahan, *Demonstration Culture. European Socialism and the Second International, 1889–1914* (Leicester: Troubador Publishing, 2010), pp. 122–123.

VOR DEM WELTKONGRESS DER IAH

Im Herbst dieses Jahres werden es zehn Jahre, daß die Internationale Arbeiterhilfe, die Organisation praktischer proletarischer Solidarität, besteht. Die IAH wurde geboren mit der Hilfsaktion für die Hungernden an der Wolga im Jahre 1921. Nach Beendigung dieser überwältigenden Unterstützungsaktion führte die IAH bei zahlreichen Streiks und Wirtschaftskämpfen Solidaritätsaktionen durch, die zu den glanzvollsten in der Geschichte des proletarischen Klassenkampfes zählen.

In zehnjähriger unermüdlicher Arbeit, die begleitet war von heftigen Angriffen und Kämpfen der Gegner, hat sich die IAH heute eine achtunggebietende Stellung innerhalb der internationalen revolutionären Arbeiterbewegung errungen. Die IAH ist heute mit ihren 18 Millionen Einzel- und Kollektivmitgliedern die stärkste internationale proletarische Organisation. Im Verlauf des nun fast zehnjährigen Bestehens hat die IAH die gewaltige Summe von 116 Millionen Goldmark, davon 70 Millionen für Unterstützungs Zwecke, aufgebracht. — Aus Anlaß des Solidaritätstages haben erneut die internationalen und zentralen Instanzen aller revolutionären Klassenorganisationen und die bekanntesten Führer der revolutionären Arbeiterbewegung die geschichtliche Bedeutung der IAH gewürdigt und ihre Sympathie mit dieser Organisation zum Ausdruck gebracht. Als Vorbereitung des Weltkongresses der IAH, sowie zur Unterstützung der gegenwärtigen wirtschaftlichen Massenkämpfe, ruft das Zentralkomitee der Internationalen Arbeiterhilfe zu einer neuen großen Welle der Agitation und Propaganda für die IAH auf. Abgeschlossen soll diese zweite, vom 1. August bis 30. September gehende Propagandawelle werden mit dem Weltkongreß der IAH, zu dem Hunderte von Delegierten aus allen Ländern und Erdteilen erwartet werden.

Welche Bedeutung hervorragende proletarische Führer der IAH beizumessen, sehen unsere Leser aus den von uns hier veröffentlichten Urteilen. Die Bilder sind als Postkarten im Verlag der IAH, Wilhelmstr. 48, Berlin W 8, erschienen, ihre weiteste Verwertung dient der proletarischen Solidarität und der Vorbereitung des Weltkongresses der IAH.



Die Internationale Solidarität des revolutionären Proletariats ist eine Tatsache, ungeachtet des schmutzigen Abschaums des Opportunismus und des Sozialchauvinismus.

W. I. LENIN



Wer die Internationale Arbeiterhilfe unterstützt, stärkt den Stoßtrupp der proletarischen Solidarität. Hinein in die IAH!

WILLI MÜNZENBERG



Das große materielle und kulturelle Werk der IAH ist unentbehrlicher und wertvoller als je. Mit alter Treue und frischer Energie vorwärts zu neuen Aufgaben!

CLARA ZETKIN



Die IAH hat die Solidarität der Ausgebeulten und die Zugehörigkeit der Massen untereinander mächtig gestärkt. Ihre wohlwollendste Organisation stützt sich mit der Zwangsbewehrung der zugrundeliegenden Gewalten aus und, vorauszusetzen durch Anteilnahme und praktische Erregenschaften, bildet sie bereits ein Element dessen, was wir erachten und was im Werden ist: die neue Gesellschaft, der Traum unserer Väter und unsere Tat.

HENRI BARBUSSE



Die IAH prägt durch unablässige Hilfsaktionen allen Genossen das Mahnwort ein:

EINER FÜR ALLE — ALLE FÜR EINEN!

GEORG LEDEBOUR

FIGURE 3.3 *Supporters of the IAH: Lenin, Münzenberg, Zetkin, Barbusse and Ledebour*
Note: Typically for the IAH's solidarity campaigns, the images and slogans presented in the *AIZ* were also printed as postcards to be distributed in service of proletarian solidarity and to create a buzz for the IAH's world congress and ten-year celebrations.

SOURCE: *ARBEITER-ILLUSTRIERTE ZEITUNG* 35 (1931).



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FIGURE 3.4 *The international delegates and guests at the IAH's congresses in Berlin, October 1931*

Note: Among the pictured personalities are Willi Münzenberg, Hans Abolin, Alfons Goldschmidt, Harry Pollitt, Käthe Kollwitz, and Ram Perih (India). Notably, although the IAH advanced a progressive support of the colonial liberation struggle, it used in the AIZ colonial/oriental terms, calling one of the depicted representatives from the colonies an “exotic” congress visitor.

SOURCE: *ARBEITER-ILLUSTRIERTE ZEITUNG* NR. 43 (1931).

the next potential stage for the world revolution, whereas Japan as a powerful industrial empire in Asia represented through its imperialist policies a reactionary and threatening power to both the security of the Soviet Union's eastern borders and the revolutionary developments in China, thus forming a threat to the very idea of radical international solidarity.

Münzenberg and the IAH were also strongly involved in organising the Amsterdam Anti-War Congress, 27–28 August 1932. As part of the anti-war campaign's global agenda, Münzenberg suggested to the Comintern that a major congress against the war should also be organised in Shanghai. Significantly, Henri Barbusse, who was one of official initiators of the Amsterdam Congress, had already agreed to travel to Shanghai.⁶⁸ On 31 May 1932, at a special meeting of the Political Commission of the Political Secretariat of the ECCI, Manuilsky officially suggested that Barbusse be sent to Shanghai. The idea was approved but, in the end, Barbusse never left for China.⁶⁹ Internationally, the prominent supporters of the Amsterdam Anti-War Congress included, for example, Romain Rolland, Albert Einstein, Heinrich Mann, Upton Sinclair (USA), General Sandino (Latin America), Sen Katayama (Japan), Mrs. Sun Yat Sen (China), Maxim Gorky, (Russia), Eleanor Despard (Ireland) and Jean Devanny (Australia).⁷⁰ The organisation of the Amsterdam Anti-War Congress shows the significant co-ordination of the IAH's and the LAI's networks for the broad and global mobilisation of the campaign. In several ways, it combined the missions of the IAH as a general solidarity organisation and the LAI's function as an anti-imperialist organisation in the joint calls for a congress against the impending imperialist war that framed the campaign in a specific anti-imperialist framework that at the same time mobilised general support for peace and international solidarity among the workers of the world.

During the early 1930s, the IAH particularly highlighted the escalating situation in Manchuria and the consequences of a new imperialist war as well as the general fear for a second World War. The Manchurian crisis was one of the major international crises of the period, and it is in this context that the IAH's anti-war work of the early 1930s must be perceived. Here, the IAH actively

68 Letter from Münzenberg to Kun, 2.4.1932, RGASPI 495/18/934, 3; and transcript of letter from Barbusse to Münzenberg, 29.3.1932, RGASPI 495/18/934, 4; Letter from Münzenberg to the Comintern [Kun?], 21.6.1932, RGASPI 495/60/238, 127.

69 Protokoll (B) Nr. 245 der außerordentlichen Sitzung der Politkommission des Pol. Sekr. des EKKI, 31.5.1932, RGASPI 495/4/192, 3.

70 List of supporters of the Anti-War Congress [1932], RGASPI 495/18/934, 15. On the Amsterdam congress, see Rosemarie Schumann, *Amsterdam 1932. Der Weltkongreß gegen den imperialistischen Krieg* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1985).

articulated in its publications a radical international solidarity that imagined a global unity of “Negroes, Whites and Asians” who were lining up along a common front against war and for the defence of the Soviet Union.⁷¹

After the 1933 forced relocation of the IAH from Berlin to Paris, the IAH and Münzenberg were mainly involved in international solidarity campaigns for the victims of Fascist oppression, e.g. for the liberation of Communist leaders imprisoned in Germany, including Georgi Dimitrov and Ernst Thälmann. The major anti-Fascist initiative of the IAH and Münzenberg was the establishment of the World Relief Committee for the Victims of German Fascism in 1933 that parallel to the World Committee Against War and Fascism headed the principal transnational Anti-Fascist campaigns in Europe and globally.⁷² In addition, the IAH was involved in early solidarity campaigns against Fascism in Spain.⁷³ One of the IAH’s final international campaigns was the organisation of the 7th International Solidarity Day, on 23 June 1935, in “all capitalist countries” and the Soviet Union. It was the very last opportunity to “demonstrate the power of international proletarian solidarity” before the IAH was itself dissolved by the Comintern.⁷⁴

As a result of the Comintern’s popular front policy and the Communists’ mission to create broad alliances against Fascism, approved by the Comintern’s

71 “Nieder mit dem imperialistischen Kriege”, *AIZ* 16 (1932); “Massenkundgebung gegen imperialistischen Krieg in Amsterdam”, *AIZ* 37 (1932); “Die Weltkrieg droht! Ein Appell an das Gewissen aller Werktätigen”, *Mahnruf. Organ für internationale Solidarität* 4 (1932); “Internationale Solidarität gegen imperialistische Krieg. Organisiert den Streik der Rüstungsindustrie. Verhindert Munitionstransporte”, *Mahnruf* 6 (1932); “Internationale Solidarität gegen imperialistischen Krieg” [cover], *Mahnruf* 4 (1932). See also Ian Nish, *Japan’s Struggle with Internationalism. Japan, China and the League of Nations, 1931–3* (London: Kegan Paul International, 2000), pp. vii–viii.

72 “Ehrenpflicht der proletarischen Solidarität: Stärkste Aktivität für die Befreiung Dimitroff, Thälmann und aller politischen Gefangenen!” *Arbeiter- und Bauern-Solidarität. Bulletin des Zentralkomitee der Internationalen Arbeiterhilfe* 3 (20.2.1934); “Thälmann muss leben!” *Solidarität. Organ des Zentralkomitees der Internationalen Arbeiterhilfe*, 3.6.1934. For a presentation of the transnational anti-Fascist campaigns, see Anson Rabinbach, “Staging Antifascism. The Brown Book of the Reichstag Fire and Hitler Terror”, *New German Critique* 35:1 (2008), pp. 97–126; and Susan D. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich. Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

73 Internal report: Hilfsaktion der spanischen IAH für die Kinder der asturischen Revolutionäre, 3.1.1935, RGASPI 539/2/740, 73.

74 Quoted in “Internationale Solidarität”, *Die Gewerkschaften der Sowjetunion. Ihre Rolle in der sozialistischen Produktion und in der Gestaltung der Lebenshaltung der Werktätigen* (Amsterdam: Verlag des Zentralkomitee der Internationalen Arbeiterhilfe, 1935), 5, BArch, R 58/3307.

World Congress organised in Moscow between 25 July and 21 August 1935, the IAH was dismembered, re-organised and largely dissolved. The Political Secretariat of the ECCI concluded that the IAH's mission to form a united front on the basis of "international proletarian solidarity" had now become the mission of the Communist Parties and the red trade unions. In place of the old IAH, a new organisation called the Volkssolidarität (People's Solidarity) was to be formed.⁷⁵ However, later in October 1935, the Comintern decided that the "re-organised" headquarters of the IAH in Paris were instead to continue in the form of the Institut zum Studium der Sozialpolitik und Sozialfürsorge (Institute for the Study of Social Policy and Social Welfare). This "new" IAH was to be focused on social policy whereas the IAH's publishing ventures such as the *AIZ* were transferred to the Comintern's World Committee Against War and Fascism. The IAH's film production company in Moscow called the Mezhrabpom-Film was again to be transferred to the control of the ECCI.⁷⁶ This was the end of both the IAH and its mission to function as a general international solidarity organisation. Ironically, although the turn to the popular front tactic of the Comintern was used as a pretext to dismember the IAH, when the Comintern gradually abandoned the popular front line during the late 1930s, there were no prospects for a re-establishment of the IAH or the other organisations for radical international solidarity. Even Münzenberg, the primary organiser of the IAH's radical solidarity campaigns had been ousted from the communist movement as a traitor and renegade.

Towards a Global Network?

The IAH nurtured a global imaginary through its international solidarity campaigns but, in order to actually work on the global scene, it required the establishment of a global network and perhaps even a global organisation in order to mobilise solidarity in various parts of the world. The former constituted a more lucid and informal connection, whereas the latter required an institutionalised structure. As an example of the IAH's expansion as an organisation, Münzenberg officially claimed in 1931 that the IAH had expanded into a significant international organisation with over 200,000 individual and 18 million

75 Entwurf zu einer Resolution des pol.Sekretariats des ECCI über die IAH; Moscow, 22.8.1935, RGASPI 495/18/1049, 54–57.

76 Beschluss über die Leitung und Organe der bisherigen IAH-Arbeit, 9.10.1935, [signed by:] Gottwald, RGASPI 495/20/911, 67–68.

collective members all around the world.⁷⁷ The international expansion of the IAH was not however curtailed after 1931. Instead, it was envisioned after the IAH's World Congress that the IAH would, in the colonial and semi-colonial countries, develop into a fully fledged mass organisation.⁷⁸ It was envisioned that especially in India, China, Egypt, Cyprus and other 'suppressed countries', the IAH's duty was to expand its current national committees into vast organisations for the workers, peasants, students and intellectuals.⁷⁹ However, with the establishment of the Third Reich and the forced transfer of the IAH's headquarters to Paris in 1933, the IAH's opportunities to function as an international solidarity organisation were radically diminished.

In the final part of this article, a preliminary outline will be provided of the IAH's international network and organisation between 1921 and 1933. In the table below the following headings indicate the nature of the network: (1) Countries where the IAH had an official headquarters;⁸⁰ (2) Countries that were only represented by delegates during the IAH's World Congress organised in October 1931 in Berlin; Countries* that were only targets of an international solidarity campaign and; (Countries) only mentioned in the official history of the IAH, published by Münzenberg in 1931 (see Table 3.1).⁸¹

In the first case, an official address had been printed either on IAH letter-headed paper or other printed documents, which suggests that an actual bureau had been established in that particular country. In the second case, the connection was not necessarily institutionalised, but constituted a network established between the IAH and a representative of a particular country. Whether this representative was actually resident in that country or functioned only as a liaison person remains at times uncertain. In the third case, the countries involved were mentioned during a particular solidarity campaign (e.g. Syria

77 Protocol: Weltkongress – Eröffnungssitzung, 10.10.1931, RGASPI 538/1/8, 1–2.

78 "Der Weltkongress beendet. Weltumspannende Arbeiterhilfe. Feierliche Schlußsitzung", *Die Welt am Abend* 241 (15.10.1931).

79 Willi Münzenberg, "Der Kampfkongress der proletarischen Solidarität", *Die Rote Fahne* 184 (18.10.1931).

80 The addresses of the national sections were printed on the IAH's letterheads. All addresses were never printed on the same letter, but varied through the years. The ones included here are assembled from letters sent on 2.8.1923 (SAPMO – BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/1, 178); 18.9.1923 (RGASPI 495/19/684, 113); 24.10.1923 (SAPMO – BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/1, 188); 24.11.1923 (GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 191, Nr. 4355, 8); 9.5.1924 (SAPMO – BArch, RY 1/I 2/3/225, 46); 19.5.1925 (RGASPI 538/2/27, 56); 26.1.1928 (RGASPI 538/2/46, 16); 22.6.1933 (SAPMO – BArch, NY 4005/19, 13). A total of 25 countries with IAH bureaus are listed in: "Ausländische Komitees der IAH" [1924], GStA PK, XII. HA, IV, Nr. 270, 26.

81 Münzenberg, *Solidarität. Zehn Jahre Internationale Arbeiterhilfe 1921–1931*.

TABLE 3.1 *Outline of the IAH's global network*⁸²

Europe and Russia			
Germany, Berlin	Great Britain, London	Ireland, Dublin	Austria, Vienna
Czechoslovakia, Prague	Netherlands, Amsterdam	Spain, Madrid	Soviet Union/Russia, Moscow
France, Paris	Sweden, Stockholm	Switzerland, Zürich	Denmark, Copenhagen
Iceland, Reykjavik	Belgium, Brussels	Norway, Christiania [Oslo]	Bulgaria, Sofia
Romania, Ploiesti	Yugoslavia, Ljubljana, Belgrad	Luxembourg	Finland, Helsinki
Poland, Tarnow	Portugal, Lisbon	Italy, Milano & Rome	Greece, Athens
Hungary*	<i>Cyprus</i>		
Asia and the Middle East			
China, Beijing & Shanghai	Japan, Tokyo & Osaka	<i>India</i>	<i>Indonesia</i>
Syria*	(Indochina)	(Palestine)	(Korea)
North and South America			
USA, Chicago & New York	Canada, Toronto	Mexico, Mexico City	Argentina, Buenos Aires
Uruguay, Montevideo (Chile)	Brazil, Niterói/Rio de Janeiro	<i>Peru</i>	(Bolivia)
Africa			
South Africa, Johannesburg	Egypt, Alexandria [Cairo]	<i>Tunisia</i>	<i>Algeria</i>
<i>Cameroon</i>	Morocco*	(Mozambique)	(Sierra Leone)
Australia			
Australia, Sydney	<i>New Zealand</i>		

* Note: = Countries that were only targets of an international solidarity campaign.

82 According to a press report, a national section of the IAH called the "Soziale Solidarität" was founded in November 1932 in Athens, Greece. See: "Die 'Soziale Solidarität'"

and Morocco), although it remains highly uncertain whether a functioning IAH network within the country in question was ever established. In most cases the IAH linked up its network to an already existing national organisation or network, such as that country's CP or a trade union committee.

If all countries mentioned in all categories were to be accepted as being part of the IAH's global network, a total of 53 countries are included. If one accepts only the countries where the IAH had official bureaus, 35 countries are included. By comparison, when the League Against Imperialism was inaugurated in Brussels in 1927, it had attracted representatives from 34 countries, whereas by 1929 it had established official national sections in only 11 countries, none of which were located in Africa or Asia.⁸³ In this respect the IAH was very successful in establishing a global network.

These totals are accurate for the period 1921–1933, but do not confirm the geographical breadth of the IAH during a specific year or campaign. Typically, national sections were established, re-organised and, when needed, re-established during any given time period. Re-establishments of IAH-sections were, for example, called for in an internal work plan in 1929 for the IAH in Argentina (and Latin America overall), Poland, India and Switzerland.⁸⁴ The only data that provides results that are valid for a specific date, comes from the IAH's World Congress that was organised in Berlin in October 1931. This congress was attended by delegates from 40 countries.⁸⁵

in Griechenland", *Internationale Arbeiterhilfe: Internationale Korrespondenz des Zentralkomitees der Internationalen Arbeiterhilfe* 2 (May 1933), BArch, R 1501/20687, 215a. According to the travel budget for the congress, a delegate from Cyprus was expected to attend the IAH's congress in Berlin. No other source has confirmed this statement. See "Gesamt-Budget: Fahrkosten der 226 Delegierten", RGASPI 538/1/10, 173–175. In December 1930, the IAH claimed that the first IAH committees had been founded in India. No other source has confirmed this statement. See: "Rüstet zum internationalen Kongreß der IAH. Zehn Jahre Internationale Arbeiterhilfe", *Die Welt am Abend* 287, 9.12.1930, BArch, R 1501/20197, 38. Delegates from Syria, Indochina, New Zealand and Palestine were expected to attend the IAH's congress in Berlin according to the travel budget for the congress. No other source has confirmed this statement. See "Gesamt-Budget: Fahrkosten der 226 Delegierten", RGASPI 538/1/10, 173–175. In December 1930, the IAH claimed that the first IAH committees had been founded in Bolivia. No other source has confirmed this statement. See: "Rüstet zum internationalen Kongreß der IAH. Zehn Jahre Internationale Arbeiterhilfe", *Die Welt am Abend* 287, 9.12.1930, BArch, R 1501/20197, 38.

83 Petersson, "We are Neither Visionaries nor Utopian Dreamers", pp. 136, 322.

84 Entwurf für einen Zweijahrsplan der IAH – Organisation [1929], RGASPI 538/2/53, 133–136.

85 "40 Delegationen berichten", *Die Welt am Abend* 239 (13.10.1931); Before the conference it was estimated that 42 countries be represented: "42 Länder-Delegation sind auf dem

The table above appears to confirm beyond any doubt the IAH's global agenda. As it can be noted, the IAH was predominately organised in Europe, but official addresses were established at least in Russia, China, Japan, the USA, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, South Africa, and Egypt. Beyond the formalised networks in the form of official bureaus, more informal networks were also established in 1931 during the IAH's World Congress via representatives from Cyprus, Tunisia, Algeria, Cameroon, Indonesia, India, Peru and New Zealand.

This tentative outline has provided a picture of the IAH's global network, but further research is needed to establish the character of its transnational networks and its networks within national sections: how close were these contacts? Who were the liaison contacts for these networks? How was the IAH perceived from the periphery, if Berlin constituted the centre? Despite these uncertainties, it can be concluded that the IAH's transnational networks had a historical significance for the transmission of articulations of radical international solidarity, anti-imperialism, and anti-Fascism on a global scale during the 1920s and early 1930s.

What seems also beyond doubt is that, thanks to its global network and international organisation, the IAH managed to articulate a powerful global imaginary. Without the establishment of a fundamental global network between the IAH's central headquarters in Berlin and the 35–53 countries represented in the table above, the IAH's articulations of an active radical international solidarity would have been much weaker and less powerful during its existence. Also thanks to its global network, the IAH was in a position to be able to claim to both oppressed and struggling workers that through the IAH, workers from Brazil to South Africa, from China to Iceland and from the USA to Australia, could send bread and provisions to the needy. Alone they were weak and oppressed, but when imagined as standing together in solidarity, they represented a rising global power.

Conclusions

This article has established that the IAH managed to create a global network with the assistance of the Comintern on all six continents where, according to

Weltkongress der IAH im Oktober in Berlin vertreten, die internationale proletarische Solidarität lebt!" Nationale Selbsthilfe oder proletarische Solidarität (1931), SAPMO – BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/12, 37.

the table above, at least two countries on each continent had official IAH bureaux. The IAH organised major international congresses, with particular reference being drawn to the 1931 World Congress in Berlin which brought together an unprecedented number of delegates from all around the world. What made the IAH's networks even stronger was how it was able to spread its publications through the networks of other international organisations connected to the Comintern such as the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, the League Against Imperialism, the International Red Aid or the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers. When these networks are all brought together and perceived as being inter-connected and all empowered for radical international solidarity, a more comprehensive picture of the power of radical international solidarity can thus be presented.

If the first condition for promoting the idea of radical international solidarity was the actual establishment of a global network, the second stage was to utilise this network in order to produce a global imaginary based on international solidarity. The IAH was successful in organising international solidarity campaigns in most parts of the world, campaigns that were always perceived as being relevant beyond the local and national context on the global scene. Throughout its existence, the IAH embraced the ideas of both uniting the workers of the world and awakening their innate solidarity for oppressed peoples, for workers in major strikes, and for working-class victims during natural calamities such as floods and earthquakes. Significantly, the IAH managed, already during the 1920s, to launch popular international solidarity campaigns which encouraged workers to "think globally" and to realise that, just as major strikes in neighbouring countries were closely linked with their own future prospects, so too were distant struggles in the colonies.

Although the IAH has not been highlighted in the previous research in either global history, the history of international organisations, or the history of international solidarity, it would seem that the IAH constitutes a significant case study as it was one of the first international organisations for global (albeit not universal) solidarity. The IAH was, at least, itself confident of its own place in world history when in 1931 it celebrated a decade of international solidarity work. With great self-satisfaction, it was proclaimed that: The IAH and its General Secretary Münzenberg had been and were still attempting to "realise the greatest idea in human history – the global solidarity of the working class" [*die weltumspannende Solidarität der Arbeiterklasse*].⁸⁶

86 "Das große Werk der IAH. Rede Willi Münzenbergs über internationale Solidarität und Volksentscheid", *Die Welt am Abend* 187, 13.8.1931, BArch, R 1501/20685, 100.

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The British Miners' and General Strike of 1926: Problems and Practices of Radical International Solidarity

Kasper Braskén

Of all the organisations, it was the International Workers' Relief that, in the best way and most quickly, prepared and launched a great aid campaign.¹

WILLI MÜNZENBERG to the Presidium of the ECCI, 2 July 1926

At one minute to midnight on 3 May 1926, between 1.5 and 1.75 million British workers went on strike in support of one million locked-out miners. This general strike was called off by the General Council of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) already on 12 May but the miners' strike continued for over six months, until they were forced back to the mines under their employers' conditions. In the end, the striking miners were forced back to work with salaries at the same level as in 1914, with longer working hours and being paid even less than they had been before the strike.²

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- 1 "Von allen Organisationen war es die Internationale Arbeiterhilfe, die am besten und frühzeitigsten sich auf eine grosse Hilfsaktion vorbereitet und einstellte", Münzenberg to the Presidium of the ECCI, 2.7.1926, RGASPI 495/2/89, 11. The acronym RGASPI stands for Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RSGAPI), formerly Moscow's Center for the Preservation of Documents of Modern History (RTsKhIDNI). The RGASPI holds the files of the Comintern Archive.
 - 2 Susan Kingsley Kent, *Aftershocks. Politics and Trauma in Britain, 1918–1931* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 142. On the general development of the miners' and the general strike see: Daniel Fairchild Calhoun, *The United Front! The TUC and the Russians, 1923–1928* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 234–291; Keith Laybourn, *The General Strike of 1926* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 1–7, 50–51, 95; Morton H. Cowden, "Soviet and Comintern Policies toward the British General Strike of 1926", *World Politics* 5:4 (1953), pp. 504–505; and Gerald D. Feldman and Irmgard Steinisch, "Notwendigkeit und Grenzen sozialstaatlicher Intervention. Eine vergleichende Fallstudie des Ruhreisenstreits in Deutschland und des Generalstreiks in England", *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* xx (1980), pp. 79–83. See also the highly readable account by Anne Perkins, *A Very British Strike. 3 May–12 May 1926* (Basingstoke: Pan Books, 2006).

The main focus of this article is on the vast international solidarity campaign organised for the British miners between April and December 1926 by the International Workers' Relief (known in German as the IAH or in English as the IWR, and in Britain as the Workers' International Relief or WIR). How did the IAH, from its central bureau in Berlin, turn the struggle of the British workers into a global affair through its articulations of radical international solidarity? This article shows how the events of 1926 provided a unique opportunity to form bonds of radical international solidarity not only between European and British workers but also between workers and radicals in the colonies – the perceived allies of the European working class – and British workers. In a sense, the tables were completely turned in comparison to traditional forms of anti-imperialist struggle: For the first time, it was no longer only Western workers who were supporting the liberation movement of the colonies but colonial nationalists were now also assisting the British workers in their struggle which could, if victorious, have helped to bring down the British Empire from within. The article will elaborate on the problems and practices of radical international solidarity by using the IAH as a significant and previously largely overlooked case study.³ It analyses both the mobilisation of solidarity for the British strikers in Germany and shows how complex and sometimes even contradictory the aims and practices of internationalism were between the IAH, the KPD (the German Communist Party) and the Comintern. The approach allows a combined analysis, first, of those giving in solidarity, secondly, of the activities of international organisations such as the IAH that held a crucial position as intermediaries between the British and the workers of the world willing to help in solidarity and, thirdly, the reception of the relief work in Britain.

The responses from the international working class have in previous research been mainly focused on the activities of the Ruhr Coal Miners, which has highlighted the role of the KPD in putting internationalism into practice in Germany. However, as Peterson (1988) shows, the Ruhr miners were in fact willing and even eager to work overtime in the mines due to the huge demand for coal on the international market caused by the British coal mines standing idle.⁴ Work opportunities overrode the idea of radical international solidarity

3 On radical transnational solidarity, see the Introduction of this volume.

4 Larry Peterson, "Internationalism and the British Coal Miners' Strike of 1926. The Solidarity Campaign of the KPD among Ruhr Coal Miners", in Frits van Holthoon and Marcel van der Linden (eds.), *Internationalism in the Labour Movement, 1830–1940* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), p. 483.

and, although slogans of symbolic solidarity were at times supported, radical action which could have threatened the coal miners' jobs was not risked. Herrmann (1988) argues along the same lines in his study on international trade union politics, concluding that the British miners' strike demonstrated how national solidarity always outweighed international solidarity.⁵ This was perhaps the case of trade-union-led solidarity, but what about the implementation of radical international solidarity, as it was articulated by the IAH?

Typically, in the previous research the radical international solidarity set in motion in support of the British miners and general strike has only been seen as an extension of Soviet foreign policy. The Soviet Union had indeed put itself in a difficult position as it was trying through its foreign policy to maintain friendly diplomatic relations with Western governments at the same time as the Comintern was striving to support the radicals operating within these same countries, as well as in the European colonies. However, Steiner (2007), for example, argues that the Soviet Union strove to keep an official distance from the general strike and therefore channelled its support to the miners' union through its trade unions. The most balanced account of the Soviets' involvement and perception of the general strike is the one by Gorodetsky (1976), but even here the IAH's role remains hidden.⁶

Towards the British General Strike

In a successful attempt to discredit any foreign support aimed at the strikers, radical international solidarity was proclaimed in the British press to be an outlandish tactic being pursued by the Soviet government in order to interfere in internal "British affairs". Working class struggles in each nation were described, particularly by the Conservatives, as being purely national issues, and thus any calls for classic working class internationalism and solidarity were ignored and de-legitimised. The workers of the world were not a transnational community but rather understood, particularly so in Britain, to be isolated national groups.

5 K. Georg Herrmann, "Der britische Bergarbeiterkampf 1926 und die internationale Gewerkschaftsbewegung. Schwierigkeiten eines 'kämpferischen' Internationalismus", in Frits van Holthoon and Marcel van der Linden (eds.), *Internationalism in the Labour Movement, 1830–1940* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), pp. 489–517; Karl Georg Herrmann, *Die Geschichte des internationalen Bergarbeiterverbandes 1890–1939* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1994), pp. 243–257.

6 Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed. European International History 1919–1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 536–537; Gabriel Gorodetsky, "The Soviet Union and Britain's General Strike of May 1926", *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 17:2–3 (1976), pp. 287–310.

Thanks to the establishment of the Soviet Union, radical international solidarity could easily be presented and de-legitimised as a threatening manoeuvre by the Russian Bolsheviks in the Soviet Union. Agency and working class activism in support of other struggling workers were completely eroded, while the "Red Menace" appeared to steer the judgement of the Conservative forces and their efforts to convince the British public of the un-British character of radical Left-wing politics.

Kent (2009) convincingly shows in her book on politics and trauma in Britain, how the atmosphere between Conservatives and Labour during the years preceding the general strike had been brewing and was now ripe with hostility and hatred. Labour was repeatedly accused of standing in allegiance with the Bolsheviks. Ramsey MacDonald's Labour government had offered *de jure* recognition of the Soviet Union in January 1924 which ultimately forced MacDonald to call a new election in October 1924. Perfectly timed, only a couple of days prior to the elections, the *Daily Mail* published the so-called "Zinoviev Letter", which they had received from the Conservative Party's central office. In this (fake) letter to the British CP, Zinoviev indirectly thanked MacDonald's Labour government for having assisted the world revolution when it recognised the Soviet Union, and the British CP was instructed to infiltrate the British armed forces. The Conservatives used this letter to portray MacDonald and Labour as being enemies within the nation and, in a crude rhetoric, the Conservatives alleged that the Labour government was in fact controlled by the CP and hence by extension, by the Bolsheviks in Moscow. The Conservatives were easily able to secure power in the new government, but although there were efforts to soften this rhetoric against Labour after the elections, there was a permanent representation of a Socialist evil "other" (uncritically uniting members of Labour, Communists and Bolsheviks) as enemies of the British people.⁷

While the Conservative Party was in power, the coal miners threatened to go on strike in the spring of 1925 in response to the mining companies' efforts to lower wages and increase working hours. Thanks to a governmental intervention, the mine owners were supported and the miners were guaranteed their existing working conditions. However, this truce in the coal mines would last only for one year – until the end of April 1926, when the term of the government's coal subsidy expired. As the miners refused to accept lower wages and longer working days, the miners were locked out on 30 April 1926. On 1 May the TUC voted almost unanimously for a British general strike to begin at one minute to midnight on 3 May 1926, if no deal could be found with the government that would alleviate the coal miners' situation. Prime Minister Baldwin

7 Kent, *Aftershocks*, pp. 122–129.

negotiated for three days with the representatives of the TUC but, partially inspired by other hard-line Conservatives, he broke off the negotiations on 3 May 1926. After these failed negotiations, the TUC telegraphed the unions that the general strike would begin at one minute to midnight the same day.⁸

The following morning, the rhetoric of hostility was trumpeted in every major Conservative newspaper. As Kent (2009) supremely shows, the general strike was publicly compared to the First World War while the strikers were compared to the German enemy. The strikers, all in all totalling approximately 2.5 million Britons, did not, therefore, belong to the British nation and the entire coverage of the strike was characterised by a war rhetoric, with union members being portrayed as being at war against the British nation: they were aliens, enemies and revolutionaries acting on the basis of a Socialism imported from abroad.⁹ The radical actions of the workers were seen as direct attacks against “the community/the public” and against the very order in society. The government’s propaganda disseminated through the *British Gazette* claimed on 8 May that the transport and railway unions were going to “do their outmost to paralyse and break down the supply of food and the necessities of life” and to “starve the people and to wreck the state”. From this perspective workers on strike became outlaws who had abandoned their community and, by extension, radical international solidarity directed to these fugitives became in the eyes of government an unacceptable criminal activity.¹⁰

Responding to the General Strike

Once the general strike had started, it was immediately perceived in Moscow as being a watershed in world history. The ECCI meeting of 7 May brought together top Soviet and Comintern representatives, including Stalin, Zinoviev, Manulsky, Kuusinen, Roy and Piatnitzky, to discuss the developments in Britain. Zinoviev argued at this meeting that, irrespective of how the strike ended, even if it ended after four or five days, it was an event of profound importance,

8 Kent, *Aftershocks*, pp. 129–131. See also L Calhoun, *The United Front!*, pp. 234–291; Laybourn, *The General Strike of 1926*, pp. 1–7, 50–51, 95; and Feldman and Steinisch, “Notwendigkeit und Grenzen sozialstaatlicher Intervention”, pp. 79–83.

9 Kent, *Aftershocks*, pp. 131–141.

10 Maguire, Richard Charles, “‘The Fascists... are... to be Depended Upon.’ The British Government, Fascists and Strike-Breaking during 1925 and 1926”, in Nigel Copsey and David Renton (eds.), *British Fascism, the Labour Movement and the State* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 6–26; Laybourn, *The General Strike of 1926*, p. 56.

declaring it to be the most important event since the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the failed 1918 German November Revolution. The British general strike was defined as being a real turning point, no matter how it ended. Zinoviev believed that the general strike conclusively proved that the era of capitalist stabilisation was over. Even if the British bourgeois managed this time to both suppress the workers and stabilise the situation through a wave of rationalisation, as they had done in Germany in 1924, Zinoviev did not believe that any stabilisation would last more than one or two years.¹¹

In Zinoviev's view, one of the strengths of the British movement was the international solidarity that had already been awakened "from Japan to Germany and" from "Russia to Australia". This strong international solidarity had not, however, been based on a belief that the British represented the vanguard of the international working class, Zinoviev stressed, but because it was felt that the British, through their strike, were opening up an entirely new chapter for the workers' movement.¹² In the previous research into the international support of the British miners' and general strike, the importance of both the Comintern and the Profintern has been emphasised, but the IAH's efforts have been largely overlooked, although, according to Münzenberg, it was the one organisation which in the best way and most quickly had prepared and initiated a large relief campaign for the British.¹³

Although neither the Soviet Union nor the Comintern was prepared for a general strike in Britain, documents show that the international trade union movement had long in advance prepared a response to the feared miners' strike/lockout set to begin on 1 May if no compromise were found. The British miners had, for example, already during the first half of April 1926 approached the IAH with a request for assistance. On 14 April, Münzenberg had sent a provisional reply stating that they would indeed support their struggle. Münzenberg wrote to the Soviet trade unions on the matter and asked them to prepare for a joint solidarity campaign with the IAH in order to assist the British. This

11 Protokoll Nr. 58 der Sitzung des Presidiums des EKKI vom 7. Mai 1926, RGASPI 495/2/71, 1–2; Zinoviev at the Sitzung des Presidiums des EKKI, 7.5.1926, "im Sekretariat des Gen. Sinowjew [Zinoviev] (Kreml)", RGASPI 495/2/71, 14–16. See further on the Comintern and its analysis of the British general strike in Andrew Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow, 1920–43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 91–103.

12 Zinoviev at the Sitzung des Presidiums des EKKI, 7.5.1926, "im Sekretariat des Gen. Sinowjew (Kreml)", RGASPI 495/2/71, 17.

13 No mention of the IAH is made, for example, in Cowden, "Soviet and Comintern Policies toward the British General Strike of 1926", pp. 512–526; Herrmann, "Der britische Bergarbeiterkampf 1926 und die internationale Gewerkschaftsbewegung", pp. 489–517; Peterson, "Internationalism and the British Coal Miners Strike of 1926", pp. 459–488.

correspondence significantly shifts the perceived geographies of radical international solidarity, as the central preparations for an international solidarity campaign for the miners were not only set in motion in Moscow or the Kremlin, but were coordinated from Berlin that functioned as a pivotal connection point between the British miners and the workers of the world, including the Soviet trade unions.¹⁴

In Essen, the Communist fraction within the IAH had, on 23 April, duly noted an article by the General Secretary of the Profintern, Losowsky, published in the *Ruhr Echo* entitled “Kampf oder Unterwerfung” [Struggle or Subordination], where the significance of the British coal miners’ struggle was recognised. Highlighting the reciprocal quality of radical international solidarity, the IAH echoed Losowski’s insistence that the struggle of the British miners was “our” struggle, that their victory was “our” victory, and that their destruction would become “our” downfall as well. The IAH was targeting the industrial proletariat of Rheinland-Westphalen, urging them to prepare themselves not only to demonstrate their symbolical solidarity, but also to actively support the struggle of the British, if the coal miners went on strike on 1 May. In the IAH’s internal instructions for the preparation of the solidarity campaign, it was stated that it would be of “great political significance” if the IAH were able to transfer large amounts of money to the British coal miners. In line with the IAH’s other solidarity campaigns organised internationally since 1921, the IAH highlighted the interconnectedness of the transnational workers’ community: Today it was the British coal miners who faced a great struggle, tomorrow it would be you. To support the IAH was the same as to “hammer” the idea of unity and solidarity into the brains of all workers.¹⁵

A newspaper article dated 26 April confirms that the IAH in the Ruhr had been closely monitoring the situation in Britain. Here the destiny of the British miners was interlinked with their own commitment to struggle but likewise seen to be dependent upon the symbolical and material assistance of the international working class. At this point, the International of Mine Workers had declared its support for the British, but the IAH expressed its concern that this solidarity would only remain a written declaration without any practical action. The struggle in Britain had not yet even started, but the IAH in Germany

14 Letter from Münzenberg to Korsotelew, “die IAH Sektion bei den Russischen Gewerkschaften”, 14.4.1926, RGASPI 538/2/38, 15.

15 “Rundschreiben der Fraktion der IAH an die Pol. Leiter der Zellengruppen”, Essen, 23.4.1926, GStA PK (Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Secret State Archives Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, Berlin), I. HA Rep. 191, Nr. 4355, 144.

was already appealing to its supporters to make all necessary preparations for a solidarity campaign for the British.¹⁶

On 2 May, immediately after the IAH had become aware of the possibility of a general strike the following day (3 May), it had sent instructions by telegraph to the national IAH sections for them to declare their support for the general strike, to start fund-raising and to announce public rallies for 6 May. At several of the IAH's public rallies, the British Communist Tom Mann held speeches.¹⁷ The IAH urged people to immediately start campaigning amongst the "proletariat of all countries" for "our brothers": the British strikers. "Only he who helps instantly, helps truly", the IAH declared. Once the news of the general strike had reached the IAH in Berlin, it had, without even consulting the KPD's leadership, begun its solidarity campaign.¹⁸

According to Münzenberg, the IAH's first appeal in support of the British general strike had been received with particular enthusiasm in Germany, Czechoslovakia and the Netherlands. In line with the IAH's message of international solidarity expressed for China in 1925 or for German strikers in 1924, it declared that the struggle of the British workers was likewise a struggle of the international working class. The defeat of the British workers would be regarded as a defeat of the international working class, just as its victory would be a victory for the international proletariat.¹⁹ The *AIZ* published two illustrated reports on the British miners' strike which highlighted the devastating consequences for the workers of the world should the strike fail.²⁰ Later in 1926, the *AIZ* portrayed on its cover scenes of solidarity taking place at the British coal mines, with the practical material relief work being highlighted (see Figure 4.1).²¹

16 "Aufruf zur Unterstützung der englischen Bergarbeiter", *Ruhr Echo* 96, 26.4.1926. The appeal was signed by the Landesvorstand der IAH, Rheinland-Westfalen, SAPMO-BArch (Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv/ Foundation Archives of Parties and Mass Organisations of the GDR in the Federal Archives, Berlin), RY 9/I 6/7/11, 20.

17 Letter from Münzenberg to das Präsidium der EKKI, 2.7.1926, RGASPI 495/2/89, 11.

18 Protokoll der Besprechungen des Pol-Büros mit Vertretern der IAH und BL Berlin-Brandenburg, Berlin, 4.5.1926, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/3/6, 107-109; "Sammelt zur Unterstützung des englischen Riesenkampfes" signed by the CC of the Arbeiterhilfe [no date / 2.5.1926], SAPMO-BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/15, 294.

19 Circular 25 from Bund der Freunde der IAH, Reichssekretariat, Dünninghaus, to "alle Landesausschüsse und selbständigen Unterbezirke", Berlin, 7.5.1926, SAPMO-BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/16, 24.

20 "Der Kampf der englischen Bergarbeiter", *AIZ* 8 (1926); "Internationale Solidarität", *AIZ* 9 (1926).

21 Zwei Millionen Kinder [Englischen Bergarbeiter] *AIZ* 17, 1926 [cover].



FIGURE 4.1 *“Two million children suffer with their parents through the British miners strike.”*
 Note: Collage of pictures of British miners’ families receiving food packages sent by the workers of the world through the IAH. For the IAH the sending of “real aid” showed the true significance of radical international solidarity.
 SOURCE: ARBEITER-ILLUSTRIERTE ZEITUNG NR. 17, 1926.

Radical International Solidarity for the General and Miners' Strike

Once the campaign had begun, Münzenberg made immediate efforts to turn the developments in Britain into a global affair. During the first few days of the general strike in Britain, Münzenberg had himself travelled to Amsterdam, Brussels and Paris in order to organise the campaign to assist the British miners.²² In a telegram sent on 9 May he could note that fund-raising by the IAH had also started in Czechoslovakia, the USA (Chicago) and Australia.²³ The IAH proposed the ideas of both stopping coal shipments to Britain and spreading the strike to the British colonies, in order to weaken the British Empire. Hopes for solidarity strikes amongst the dockers in both the West and East Indies, amongst the miners in Australia and "mutinies in Chinese waters" were, for example, expressed by the IAH.²⁴ The IAH's slogans consequently proclaimed also in Germany: "No coal from the mining industry to England!", "No ship with coal to England!", "No transportation of German or transitory coal to England!"²⁵ It seems, however, that the German workers were unable – and perhaps even unwilling – to stop the transportation of coal from the Ruhr area, and the IAH urged the workers to ensure that it would not be used as "strike-breaking coal".²⁶

On 7 May, the IAH had telegraphed the TUC that the IAH was in the position to "offer the TUC food for the important sections [sic] of the striking working classes in Great Britain".²⁷ It is well known that two attempts were made during the general strike to transfer funds from Moscow. As a response to the general strike, the Soviet trade unions notified the IAH that, as a first measure, they would send 250,000 Russian Roubles through the IAH to the TUC. An additional two million Roubles would be sent shortly. These donations caused a great deal of excitement within the IAH. They were even perceived as being the start of a vast campaign that could only be compared to the 1921 solidarity

22 Letter from Münzenberg to das Präsidium der EKKI, 2.7.1926, RGASPI 495/2/89, 11.

23 Telegram from Willi [Münzenberg] to Misiano at the Mezhrabpom in Moscow, 8.5.1926, SAPMO-BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/6, 185; see also: Pressedienst der IAH zum englischen Bergarbeiterstreik, Berlin, 12.5.1926, SAPMO-BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/15, 327.

24 "Streikwirkungen in den Kolonien", Pressedienst der IAH zum englischen Bergarbeiterstreik, Berlin, 11.5.1926, SAPMO-BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/15, 324.

25 "Verschärfung der Situation in England", Pressedienst der IAH zum englischen Bergarbeiterstreik, SAPMO-BArch, 9/I 6/7/15, 329.

26 "Stärkere Kohlenverladungen im Ruhrgebiet", Pressedienst der IAH zum englischen Bergarbeiterstreik, 14.5.1926, SAPMO-BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/15, 331.

27 Telegram from the IAH to the General Council of the TUC, 7.5.1926, SAPMO-BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/15, 318.

campaign for the famine in Soviet Russia.²⁸ However, in most previous research the first amount of £26,427 has only been reported as “Moscow gold”, but the transfer of money to Walter McClennan Citrine, the head of the TUC, was in fact described as being the first fund-raising results of a joint appeal by the Red International of Labour Unions (Profintern) and the IAH. The TUC Council discussed the first donation on 8 May, but concluded that while the general strike could be handled by the unions’ own funds, it was feared that the acceptance of any money would make the TUC easy prey for Conservative critics, who would then have “proof” of the TUC’s subversive aims.²⁹

The second transfer from Moscow of £100,000 was intercepted by the British government and returned to Moscow. Now the TUC could not receive money from abroad even if it had wanted to. The Conservatives swiftly passed a law which criminalised the receipt of foreign funds for strike aid, and anyone receiving such funds ran the risk of being charged with treason. On 7 May, the Cabinet even agreed to prohibit all banks from paying out any foreign money “for purposes prejudicial to the public safety or life of the community”.³⁰

With discomfort, the IAH noted in its press bulletin on 14 May that the TUC had indeed refused the funds donated from both the Soviet trade unions and the IAH’s internationally collected funds. The government’s actions against “foreign donations” did not change the IAH’s situation, and it declared that the support and aid of the international proletariat was indeed unshakeable. As a measure to get around the new British legislation, the IAH aimed to establish an Aid Foundation [Hilfsfond] that would be at the disposal of the IAH’s British section. In the IAH’s publications this campaign was perceived as only being a modest start: the IAH even stated that great damage would be done to the practical solidarity being carried out for the British, if the solidarity campaign

28 Letter from the CC of the Arbeiterhilfe to “Liebe Kameraden”, 9.5.1926, SAPMO-BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/7, 52. On the reactions of the IFTU towards the general strike see: Geert Van Goethem, “Conflicting Interests. The International Federation of Trade Unions (1919–1945)”, in Anthony Carew, et al. (eds.), *The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 102–107. On the famine relief campaign for Soviet Russia in 1921–1922, see Kasper Braskén, *The International Workers’ Relief, Communism, and Transnational Solidarity. Willi Münzenberg in Weimar Germany* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), Chapter 2.

29 See original quote in Gorodetsky, “The Soviet Union and Britain’s General Strike of May 1926”, p. 298. NB! The IAH is here called the “International Workers’ Aid”. See also Harriette Flory, “The Arcos Raid and the Rupture of Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1927”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 12:4 (1977), p. 711.

30 Quoted from Calhoun, *The United Front!*, p. 240.

was halted and the million mine workers were left without any support.³¹ Meanwhile, the IAH converted its strike funds into a general "relief fund" for the struggling British workers. In this way, the IAH could engage in the support of the families of the strikers through the British section of the IAH, the Workers' International Relief (WIR).³²

Proletarian Solidarity between National and International

It appears that, despite the IAH's urgent calls for international solidarity in Germany in support of the British strikers, the main energy and focus of the German CP were being channelled into the German national referendum against royal privilege (Fürsten).³³ From the beginning, the KPD had been very sceptical towards the IAH's solidarity campaign. On 4 May, the day after the strike had commenced, Münzenberg was called in for a talk with the KPD's Politbüro. The KPD declared that it had been an error on the part of the IAH to publish an appeal for aid to the British. Furthermore, the KPD representatives stated that it was incorrect to launch a fund-raising campaign for the British strikers, as the Party felt that it was not financial assistance that the British needed. It appears that the KPD wanted national campaigns, i.e. solidarity campaigns for the German workers, to be prioritised as they were more important than international solidarity campaigns for British workers. Fund-raising for the British was regarded as being one campaign competing with other on-going campaigns in Germany, especially bearing in mind the forthcoming national referendum. Rather astonishingly, while Zinoviev in Moscow was declaring it to be a turning point of historical proportions, the German

31 Pressedienst der IAH zum englischen Bergarbeiterstreik, Berlin, 14.5.1926, RGASPI 538/2/39, 15.

32 "Verschärfung der Lage in England", [undated, early May 1926], SAPMO-BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/15, 19; Pressedienst der IAH für die Streikenden Bergarbeiter!, Berlin, 9.5.1926, SAPMO-BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/15, 321; "Verschärfung der Situation in England", Pressedienst der IAH zum englischen Bergarbeiterstreik, SAPMO-BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/15, 329; "Der Kampf in England geht weiter", Pressedienst der Internationalen Arbeiterhilfe zum englischen Bergarbeiterstreik, Berlin, 14.5.1926, SAPMO-BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/15, 330. On the continuation of the campaign in Germany see: "Hilfe den englischen Bergarbeitern! An alle Leitungen der KPD, des KJBD, der IAH, des RFB, des RFMB, der Rote Hilfe! An die oppositionellen Kollegen der Gewerkschaften und der Kultur- und Sportorganisationen im Bezirk Halle-Merseburg", SAPMO-BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/16, 85-86.

33 "Die IAH hilft den Raub der Fürsten verhindern", *Arbeiter-Hilfe. Organ der Internationalen Arbeiterhilfe* (May 1926); "Verhindert den Raubzug der Fürsten", *AIZ* 4 (11.3.1926).

KPD leadership was striving to obstruct the IAH's solidarity campaign. The KPD was also concerned that, if the IAH decided to organise a fund-raising appeal without the KPD's support, the results would not be very impressive and the Party would be blamed for the failure. The KPD instead supported a fund-raising campaign organised by the German trade unions.³⁴

Münzenberg had no qualms about the IAH's actions. As he explained to the KPD, the IAH was duty-bound (*verpflichtet*) by the Comintern itself to launch aid campaigns in support of major strikes. In other words, Münzenberg explained to the KPD, he did not need to ask the KPD for its permission to launch a solidarity campaign, as he was following orders from a higher level. Münzenberg explained to the KPD that it had already been decided during an earlier unspecified Extended ECCI meeting with representatives of the British CP, the Secretariat of the Comintern and the IAH that, if a conflict in Britain arose, the IAH would immediately launch a solidarity campaign. Furthermore, Münzenberg explained to the KPD, the IAH's initial appeal was not only being launched for Germany, but "for the whole world", which highlights the IAH's global ambitions as a radical international solidarity organisation. The IAH's aim was not to "collect millions" for the British but, according to Münzenberg, it would simply be wrong not to raise funds. From the perspective of international solidarity, it would simply not look good if the IAH reported international fund-raising results without Germany being included.³⁵

It is interesting to note that the KPD representative regarded the aim of the international solidarity campaign for the British workers as being primarily to create a fighting spirit within Germany, not actually to assist the British workers through any practical solidarity work.³⁶ However, three days later, the KPD reported to the ECCI concerning the fund-raising for the British that, as the IAH had officially been assigned the mission, the KPD had bowed to the IAH's demands and instructed its "comrades" to support it.³⁷ Münzenberg was, however, still highly critical towards the KPD in July 1926. "Although the IAH's campaign had been supported, it had also been partially complicated, paralysed and even hindered and sabotaged", he claimed. In several countries, the CPs had been very reluctant to support the IAH. For example, in Germany,

34 Protokoll der Besprechungen des Pol-Büros mit Vertretern der IAH und BL Berlin-Brandenburg, 4.5.1926, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/3/6, 107–109.

35 SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/3/6, 108.

36 SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/3/6, 108.

37 Letter from Zentralkomitee der KPD, Sekretariat, to die deutsche Vertretung beim EKKI, Berlin, 7.5.1926, SAPMO-BArch, RY 1/I 2/5/33b, 265.

the KPD's CC had delayed starting its campaign until 7 May when it finally informed the IAH that it would tolerate the campaign. However, *Rote Fahne* was still recommending to its Communist readers to support the fund-raising efforts of the trade unions and not those of the IAH.³⁸

After the nine-day general strike had ended, Münzenberg concluded to the Presidium of the ECCI that the IAH's international campaign for the British miners had been severely curtailed due to the reluctant and resisting national Communist Parties which had not wanted to support its campaign. Significantly, previous research has often represented the heads of the national CPs as the imposers of the Comintern's global aspirations upon the reluctant rank-and-file Communists, who were trying to implement them within their local circumstances.³⁹ Here, there was perhaps a genuine connection between the global aspirations of the Comintern and the classic working class oppositional cultures of radical international solidarity as subscribed to by many rank-and-file workers. The KPD was trying to steer the workers' expressions of solidarity towards national issues whereas the IAH and the Comintern were trying to get the working class to focus on the general strike. Due to the contradictions between these articulations of radical international solidarity, the campaign had, according to Münzenberg, only been successfully realised in Czechoslovakia, France, Belgium and Austria. Even in the Soviet Union, where the Russian Communist Party had forbidden the formation of IAH organisations, the trade unions had refused to assist the IAH. Münzenberg could understand the stance of the Soviet trade unions as they evidently felt that the IAH was nothing more than an unnecessary intermediary. It was politically more valuable for them to be in direct contact with the strikers and to hand over their donations directly. This was, however, a major problem for the IAH if it wanted to function as a credible international solidarity organisation. If it could not report any fund-raising results from the Soviet Union, it would, in Münzenberg's view, become the immediate prey of the Social Democrats and other adversaries, as they could argue that even the Soviets did not pay any attention to the organisation. Münzenberg hence proposed that, in future, 5–10 percent of the Soviet trade union funds would be channelled through the IAH.⁴⁰

Furthermore, in many other countries the IAH's fund-raising had been complicated by a parallel campaign by the International Red Aid (IRA) which had

38 Letter from Münzenberg to das Präsidium der EKKI, 2.7.1926, RGASPI 495/2/89, 110b–12.

39 Joachim C. Häberlen, "Between Global Aspirations and Local Realities. The Global Dimensions of Interwar Communism", *Journal of Global History* 7:3 (2012), pp. 415–437.

40 Letter from Münzenberg to das Präsidium der EKKI, 2.7.1926, RGASPI 495/2/89, 12–120b.

started collecting funds for the imprisoned British strikers.⁴¹ Münzenberg acknowledged the IRA's mission but demanded that it refrain from launching a parallel fund-raising initiative while the struggle was still taking place. The actions of the IRA during the general strike frustrated Münzenberg immensely, as he felt that the organising of competing campaigns was doing more harm than good.⁴² In fact, this constituted a typical example of competing and parallel international solidarity campaigns organised by the IAH and the IRA which caused significant conflict both within the Comintern and within the national Communist Parties. These examples clearly show that the Communist movement was in a state of confusion and conflict when drumming up support for the British strikers, which reveals many of the problems associated with mobilising radical international solidarity.⁴³

Fund-Raising and Material Assistance

When assessing the financial results of the IAH's fund-raising appeals for the British miners in Germany, one has to bear in mind the fact that the German authorities were very reluctant to grant fund-raising permits. For example, in the Halle-Merseburg area, the authorities had decided that "under no circumstances" would the IAH's fund-raising requests be approved because the German economic situation did not permit fund-raising for foreigners, and because the IAH's campaign had an overtly political undertone.⁴⁴ The implementation of radical international solidarity within Europe was indeed being strongly challenged, as the German authorities banned fund-raising for "foreign causes", while the British banned the receipt of any such funds.

Münzenberg later explained that the IAH had never had great hopes regarding the financial results of its campaign. The circles that the IAH's fund-raising campaign could appeal to had simply been exhausted after continual

41 During the general strike, 99 arrests for Communist activity were made in Britain and by the end of May, 135 Communists were in prison according to Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow*, p. 94.

42 Letter from Münzenberg to das Präsidium der EKKI, 2.7.1926, RGASPI 495/2/89, 11–12ob.

43 See further in Braskén, *The International Workers' Relief, Communism, and Transnational Solidarity*.

44 "Betrifft: Genehmigung einer öffentlichen Sammlung der Freunde der Internationalen Arbeiterhilfe zu Gunsten englischer Bergarbeiter", Merseburg, 3.9.1926, BArch, R 1501/113208, 271–272; "Betr.: Sammlungen des Roten Frontkämpferbundes und der Internationalen Arbeiterhilfe für die streikenden englischen Bergarbeiter", Berlin, 15.11.1926, BArch, R 58/3304, 74–75.

fund-raising appeals. This was especially true for Germany, Münzenberg reported. Thus, the main significance of this campaign had been in the form of political-moral aid. According to Münzenberg's figures, the IAH had, by early July 1926, collected 60,000 marks in Germany, 20,000 marks in America, 40,000 marks in Czechoslovakia, 1,500 marks in the Netherlands, 10,000 marks in France and 5,000 marks in other countries. However, Münzenberg was keen to compare the IAH's fund-raising results in Germany with those of the much larger ADGB (Allgemeiner deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, the General Federation of German Trade Unions) which, according to Münzenberg, had not collected more than 20,000 marks and was hoping to reach 40,000 marks. From this perspective, the IAH's fund-raising results were, in Münzenberg's view, after all rather impressive.⁴⁵

In the IAH's press reports, its fund-raising results were significantly overestimated, but the IAH was also involved in organising a great number of rallies and fund-raising drives for the British strikers which together crucially contributed towards the creation of spaces for radical international solidarity. In its press report published on 12 May, it stated that hundreds of meetings dealing with the coal miners' and general strike were going to be organised in Germany over the coming days: e.g. in Czechoslovakia the IAH and the organisations it co-operated with had organised rallies in 50 cities and towns; in Chicago the IAH in the USA was preparing a fund-raising drive; alternative forms of support were being proposed in France, where the IAH section had offered the striking British workers to take care of 300 children from striking families in a children's home; the Danish unions had again declared their willingness to assist with a weekly financial contribution to the strikers.⁴⁶

These various national fund-raising drives provide an alternative perspective on the character of radical international solidarity. The perspective focusing on the solidarity campaigns as an strategic extension of the Soviet Union's foreign policy clearly ignores and overlooks the fund-raising efforts made by the workers of the world in solidarity with the struggling British workers. For example, a *Gemeinschaft proletarischer Polizeibeamten* (Association of Proletarian Police Officers) at the Berlin Police proudly documented in the local Police newspaper on 15 May that they had donated 170 German Marks to the IAH in Berlin after a fund-raising drive for the striking British miners.⁴⁷

45 Letter from Münzenberg to das Präsidium der EKKI, 2.7.1926, RGASPI 495/2/89, 11–110b.

46 Pressedienst der IAH zum englischen Bergarbeiterstreik, Berlin, 12.5.1926, RGASPI 538/2/39, 12–14.

47 "Polizeibeamte unterstützen die streikenden englischen Arbeiter" *Der Polizeibeamte. Organ für die Interessen der Polizeibeamten aller Gattungen Deutschlands* 3 (Juli 1926), BArch, R 1501/113284, 305.

If these fund-raising efforts “from below” are included as being significant elements of the inter-war articulations of radical international solidarity, then the receiving end, the actual delivery of this support, must also be included. In early June 1926, the IAH delivered its first packages of provisions to the children of the British miners. At an event in the Kent area, 7,000 food packages were distributed, and the Chairman of the British IAH, George Lansbury (1859–1940), who at the time was a Labour member of the House of Commons, gave an inspirational speech on proletarian solidarity being the worker movement’s moral and real display of power. Significantly, Lansbury elaborated on the reciprocal quality of international solidarity, as in 1923 the British workers had donated money and expressed their solidarity for Germany and now, three years later, the provisions being delivered by the IAH had originated from German and Czechoslovakian workers. Lansbury was a strong supporter of socialist internationalism and he was the next year elected Chairman of the League Against Imperialism (LAI), when it was founded in February 1927 in Brussels.⁴⁸

Most proudly, in one of its publications in Berlin, the IAH published a thank-you letter sent by Arthur James Cook (1884–1931) to the IAH. A.J. Cook had been a founding member of the CP of Great Britain, but had resigned from the party in September 1921. He had been a member of the Executive Committee of the Miners’ Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) since 1921 and from 1924 until his death he was the MFGB’s national secretary. This letter, dated 7 July 1926, expressed the deepest gratitude on behalf of the British miners, but stressed that the struggle was not yet over and that the striking miners required further assistance. Cook particularly emphasised the importance of assisting the striking workers’ children who, thanks to the IAH’s donations, had been provided with food. Hence, the IAH urged everyone to financially support the “heroic struggle” of the British miners.⁴⁹ The success or failure of the British miners’ strike was narrowed down by the IAH to the basic issue of hunger and food supply, which strengthened the message of the IAH’s practical solidarity work. The miners could only triumph if the spectre of hunger could be kept away from their families, the IAH argued. Only when it was no longer possible to

48 “Verteilung von Lebensmittelpaketen der IAH in England”, Pressedienst der IAH zum englischen Bergarbeiterstreik, 2.6.1926, SAPMO–BArch, RY 9/I 6/7/15, 332. On Lansbury and the LAI, see further Fredrik Petersson, “*We are Neither Visionaries Nor Utopian Dreamers*”, *Willi Münzenberg, the League against Imperialism and the Comintern, 1925–1933* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2014) as well as Chapter 5 of this volume.

49 “Übt Solidarität!”, Arbeiterhilfe, Sekretariat Berlin-Brandenburg, SAPMO–BArch, RY 1/I 2/8/87, 59–59a. For Cook’s analysis of the strike, see A.J. Cook, *The Nine Days. The Story of the General Strike Told by the Miners’ Secretary* (London: 1926).

provide for the children of the strikers would the capitalists be able to crush the strikers (see Figure 4.2). The duty of both the IAH and the workers was to show their enemies that proletarian solidarity was more than just empty vows, that it was a "real, sharp invincible weapon" of the working class in its struggle against "exploitation and oppression".⁵⁰

Under the IAH's British Secretary, Helen Crawford (1877–1954), the British section of the IAH distributed food packages to needy families affected by the coal miners' strike. For example, in Lochore Fifeshire, the IAH organised an event allegedly attended by members of both the Independent Labour Party, Labour, the CP and women's co-operatives. A total of 225 food packages were distributed to larger families. At least according to the local representative reporting to Crawford, these packages had been received with gratitude, as they alleviated the miners' desperate plight. At other sites, thousands more packages had been distributed. In letters to the IAH's central office in London, the plight of the miners was described by the local functionaries as being quite desperate, as no trade union support was available. Their level of destitution was stressed with descriptions of how the miners' children were often forced to go to school without shoes, as one representative from Derbyshire lamented.⁵¹

In retrospect, Crawford confessed in her autobiography that although the international assistance to the miners increased the feeling of international solidarity, she many times "felt the futility of it all". If only the British railway and transport workers had refused to handle the coal imports from Europe and America, Crawford imagined that the matter could have been ended quickly in favor of the workers. Crawford, like probably many other workers, felt sick to see how the miners' suffering had been "unnecessarily prolonged". The general strike had been in Crawford's mind a historic moment in the history of Britain when the rank-and-file had given evidence of an unprecedented working class loyalty and solidarity. From this perspective, it was only the betrayal of the "right wing leaders" of the TUC that had caused its disappointing end. The solidarity of the rank-and-file was perceived as pure and strong, only terminated and betrayed by the leadership.⁵²

50 "Hilfe für die englischen Bergarbeiter! An alle Werktätigen, Männer und Frauen der schaffenden Volkes! An alle Gewerkschafter, Genossenschafter, Sportler, Angehörige aller Kulturorganisationen!", SAPMO–BArch, RY 1/I 2/8/86, 51–52a.

51 Letter from J. Fraser to Helen Crawford, Lochore Fifeshire, 7.9.1926, RGASPI 538/2/39, 30. Other mentioned distributions occurred in Fife, Kinross, Clackmannan, North East Derbyshire.

52 Helen Crawford, Original Unpublished Manuscript, Helen Crawford Papers, Marx Memorial Library, London, pp. 276–283.



Während des englischen Bergarbeiterstreiks 1926 verpflegte die IAH viele Tausende von Bergarbeiterkindern.

FIGURE 4.2 *International Workers' Relief / Workers of Other Lands Send Help to the Miners' Children / Not Charity, but International Workers' Self-Help*

SOURCE: MÜNZENBERG, *SOLIDARITÄT* (1931).

Contrary to Crawford's pessimistic assessments, the miners were not left alone. The solidarities forged by the IAH's practical relief work continued to emphasise the significance of radical international solidarity in the transnational networks of the IAH. As part of its practical solidarity work to the coal miners, the IAH started to publish an English edition of its illustrated Bulletin entitled "*Help the British Miners!*" *Bulletin of the Central Committee of the International Workers' Relief* in September 1926.⁵³ On the cover of its first English Bulletin, the IAH showed a picture of a mining community in Durham receiving the IAH's food packages: The IAH was "feeding miners' kiddies", the headline proclaimed. In the Bulletin the IAH clearly articulated how radical international solidarity was being empowered by the workers of the world. By 22 August, the Soviet trade unions had allegedly collected £500,000 for the British miners, while successful fund-raising was being realised in South Africa, Australia, Argentina, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia and at the All India Trade Union Congress. According to the IAH, the larger donations were

53 See the Bulletin for September 1926 in RGASPI 538/2/39, 46–47ob.

always transferred to the Miners' Federation, whereas donations from smaller countries were channelled through the IAH's British section to the miners' children. The global spread of the solidarity campaign for the British miners shows how it continued as an integral part of the transnational world of the IAH and how it was used as significant proof of the reality and power of radical international solidarity.⁵⁴

In its November Bulletin, the IAH appealed to "make it a merry Christmas for the British miners and their families", urging working class women to engage themselves in voluntary sewing groups where they could make clothing for the miners and for their wives and children. The call for the establishment of sewing rooms had been sent out in an international appeal through the IAH's international organisation, and it showed the continuity of the IAH's solidarity work, as it had engaged working-class women in similar practical solidarity efforts already in 1921.⁵⁵

It seems, however, that the IAH was at loggerheads with the leadership of the British CP and, although the Secretary of the British IAH, Helen Crawford, pointed out that during the miners' strike the situation had been very much in favour of developing the IAH's organisation, the British CP had in fact forbidden the publication of any of the IAH's appeals. Crawford regretted that such a splendid opportunity for establishing the IAH as a membership organisation in Britain had been missed in 1926 when the IAH had provided the coal fields with aid amounting to over £14,000. In late 1927, Crawford reported that all IAH activities had ceased in Britain.⁵⁶ In Germany, the IAH later announced that the German fund-raising for the British strikers had resulted in a total amount of 226,000 marks being raised.⁵⁷

54 *Help the British Miners! Bulletin of the Central Committee of the Workers' International Relief* (September 1926), RGASP 538/2/39, 46–47ob.

55 *Help the British Miners! Bulletin of the Central Committee of the Workers' International Relief* (November 1926), RGASP 538/2/39, 50–51ob.

56 "Memorandum on the Workers' International Relief, Great Britain", 24.11.1927, RGASPI 538/2/41, 42–43. The Comintern compiled in November 1926 a separate report on the solidarity campaigns organised by the CPs in Germany, France, America, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Holland for the British miners' and general strike. "Die Durchführung der Kampagnen von sieben KI-Sektionen während des englischen General- und Bergarbeiterstreik, 22.11.1926 (Deutschland, Frankreich, Amerika, Italien, Tschechoslowakei, Polen, Holland)", RGASPI 495/165/48, 20–45.

57 "Für die englischen Bergarbeiter", in Bericht über die Tätigkeit der Internationalen Arbeiterhilfe in dem wirtschaftlichen Kämpfen des Jahres 1927 und über ihr Verhältnis zu den Gewerkschaften; signed by Reichsleitung der IAH, BArch, R 8051/38, 121.

Conclusion

The IAH's international solidarity campaign for the British miners' and general strike provided the opportunity to engage in a new language of radical international solidarity in the context of anti-imperialism. However, although the IAH did make an attempt to globalise its solidarity campaign, it was clear that its campaign would mainly involve the provision of political and moral support, despite the fact that a significant portion of the IAH's legitimacy as a solidarity organisation was based on its efforts to provide material assistance. It was precisely this aspect of providing actual relief, of proving that international solidarity was not merely empty words but also real action, which in fact defined what radical international solidarity actually was.

These were not, however, uncontested endeavours, as the IAH was challenged not only by the national Communist Parties, but also by the IRA and the Soviet trade unions with competing and parallel solidarity campaigns. Through the analysis of the IAH's relations with the KPD in the context of the British general strike, the KPD's internationalism seems less convincing than often understood, as it was primarily concerned with issues pertaining to proletarian solidarity within a national context. Even when the KPD engaged in solidarity for others, its goal was not necessarily to actually provide assistance to the British strikers and their families, but to use the fight of the British to enhance the fighting spirit in a German national context and for other national aims and campaigns. For the IAH, its support for the British miners represented its first and last major solidarity campaign directed at Britain during the inter-war era, although the IAH since 1925 had been and would become very involved in various parts of the British Empire. Despite the many practical problems, for the IAH this campaign for the British miners represented an unprecedented opportunity to showcase the global power and potential of radical international solidarity during major strikes in Europe. In a spectacular way, the local struggles for improved wages and working conditions in the British coal mines was, through radical international solidarity, envisioned and expanded into a global strike and wave of protest against the British Empire. Although it was never a movement strong enough to actually bring down the British Empire, during the nine short days of the General Strike the IAH was both able to declare to the British miners that the workers of the world were on their side and to show how the IAH's networks could link together the local expressions of solidarity articulated around the world into a demonstration of global solidarity. Its message was clear: in times of urgent struggles against oppression, radical international solidarity could even bring the most powerful Empire of them all to its knees, if only temporarily.

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Anti-imperialism and Nostalgia: A Re-assessment of the History and Historiography of the League Against Imperialism

Fredrik Petersson

Nostalgia suggests the longing for the past, an understanding in “the face of change” of something that no longer exists. The history of twentieth-century resistance movements against colonialism and imperialism is a narrative that falls within this framework where, as social geographer Alastair Bonnett suggests in his *Left in the Past* (2010), the nostalgia of anti-colonialism refers to both freedom from colonialism and the return to an “older, pre-colonial era”.¹ The gathering of twenty-nine leaders from African and Asian countries at the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, in April 1955, can be seen as a practical expression of nostalgia. When the President of Indonesia, Achmed Sukarno, addressed the conference delegates, he unlocked the sensation of nostalgia in his opening address when he observed that:

[...] we are gathered here today as a result of sacrifices. Sacrifices made by our forefathers and by the people of our own and younger generations. [...] Only a few decades ago, it was frequently necessary to travel to other countries and even other continents before the spokesmen of our peoples could confer. I recall in this connection the Conference of the “League Against Imperialism and Colonialism” which was held in Brussels almost thirty years ago. At that Conference, many distinguished delegates who are present here today met each other and found new strength in their fight for independence.²

Historian Christopher J. Lee writes that the Bandung conference can be perceived as being the *rendezvous* of decolonisation. Yet, Lee makes a longer historical connection that stretches further back from Bandung, dating back to a series of anti-colonial meetings and congresses where the system of

1 Alastair Bonnett, *Left in the Past. Radicalism and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Continuum, 2010), pp. 5, 88–89.

2 George McTurnan Kahin (ed.), *The Asian-African Conference: Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1956), p. 40.

colonialism, imperialism and racial oppression had been seriously discussed and questioned, e.g. the W.E.B. Du Bois' Pan-African congresses, the Universal Race Congress in London in 1911, the Pan-Asian People's Congresses (in 1926 and 1927), and the "First Congress Against Colonialism and Imperialism" in Brussels on 10–14 February 1927.³ It is in this context that we can see how Sukarno's reference in Bandung to the Brussels Congress assumed a nostalgic point of reference for the understanding of twentieth-century anti-colonialism. While these two events are separated both in time and in space, Bandung and Brussels nevertheless still both represent central moments in the history of twentieth-century resistance against the established world order, and the interconnection between these two events must be perceived as being an expression of both how and why the practical transference of ideas and movements turned into such a legacy for twentieth-century anti-imperialism.

What can we make of the League Against Imperialism and For National Independence (LAI; 1927–1937) within this history? The LAI was a sympathising organisation established at the Brussels Congress on 10–14 February 1927.⁴ Its slogan at the Brussels Congress was "National Freedom – Social Equality" and, by locating the event in one of the "hearts of European imperialism", the objective of the principal organiser behind the congress, the German Communist Willi Münzenberg (1889–1940), was to create a massive demonstration against colonialism and imperialism. 174 accredited delegates representing 134 organisations, associations, and political parties from European and Western labour movements, stood side-by-side with colonial delegates who had either

3 Christopher J. Lee, "Introduction", in Christopher J. Lee (ed.), *Making a World after Empire. The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), pp. 9–10.

4 The LAI was alternatively referred to by its contemporaries and in scholarly works as the *Anti-Imperialist League*, *League against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression*, *League against Imperialism and Colonialism*. Yet the abbreviation LAI shall be retained as the point of reference throughout this chapter. This text has undergone several transformations. This chapter is mainly based on my doctoral dissertation, Fredrik Petersson, *"We Are Neither Visionaries Nor Utopian Dreamers": Willi Münzenberg, the League against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925–1933* (Åbo Akademi University, 2013, published by Lewiston: Queenston Press, Vol. 1–II, 2013). The origins of this text have been taken from the conference paper and presentation, "The *League against Imperialism*, Anti-Colonialism, Networks & Place: The Historiography of a Communist Front Organisation", part of the panel "International Solidarity: Radical and Leftwing Networks During the Interwar Period" at the European Social Science History Conference (ESSHC) in Glasgow on April 11, 2012. Finally, the first version was published as a working paper in the Comintern Working Papers (CoWoPa) series, Åbo Akademi University (Holger Weiss ed.) under the title "Caught Between Nostalgia, Anti-Colonialism, International Communism, Transnational Networks and Radical Spaces: A Re-Assessment of the Historiography of the League against Imperialism" (2013).

arrived from the colonies or were living in Europe. The presence of Socialists, trade unionists, radical pacifists, intellectuals and Communists clearly defined the political nature of the event and, according to its agenda, published in the official protocol from the congress in *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont* (1927), the congress covered numerous political and geographical dimensions of colonial oppression and imperialist practices. The Brussels Congress delivered verbal declarations on, for example, the Chinese freedom struggle, British imperialism in India, Persia and Mesopotamia, the national liberation struggle in Egypt and amongst the Arab peoples, as well as the African movement for liberation and its connection with the Negro freedom struggle. The event emphasised “struggle” and “oppression” as its guiding ethos and, as Vijay Prashad states in *The Darker Nations*, the congress turned into a genuine “experiment in intra-planetary solidarity”. Yet, at the same time, Brussels was an unlikely place in which to conceive the embryo that would later develop into Jawaharlal Nehru’s concept of the Non-Aligned-Movement (NAM) and the Third World (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2).⁵

Brussels was never the geographical operative centre for the LAI’s activities, however. After the congress, that centre was located in Berlin. Initially, both the Brussels Congress and the LAI had been an organisational undertaking, prepared and convened through the meticulous planning and contacts of Münzenberg who, through his control as International Secretary of the proletarian solidarity mass organisation Internationale Arbeiterhilfe (IAH; 1921–1935),⁶ managed to secure the organisational and political framework of the event. However, the IAH was intimately connected to the Communist International (Comintern, Third International; 1919–1943), and it was only with the Comintern’s consent and support that the Brussels Congress could be realised. In fact, both the Brussels Congress and the establishment of the LAI in 1927 were initially the result of the Comintern’s ambition to create an international organisation that could function as a “neutral intermediary” between the Comintern and nationalist movements in the colonies. Secondly, one of the first challenges the LAI was faced with was how to transform the impressive demonstration in Brussels into an organised body in Berlin: the “Comintern village” in Europe. This turned into a history characterised by internal and external pressures, and by a narrative which reveals the transnational character

5 Louis Gibarti, *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont. Offizielles Protokoll des Kongresses gegen koloniale Unterdrückung und Imperialismus Brüssel, 10.15. Februar 1927* (Berlin: Neuer Deutscher Verlag, 1927), pp. 282–284; Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations. A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007), pp. xvi–xvii, 22.

6 On the IAH, see further Chapter 3 of this volume.



Delegierte während einer Pause im Hof des Palais Egmont

FIGURE 5.1 *The anti-imperialist beacon in Brussels. Visionaries resting outside of Palais Egmont February 1927*

SOURCE: LOUIS GIBARTI (HRSG.), *DAS FLAMMENZEICHEN VOM PALAIS EGMONT* (BERLIN: NEUER DEUTSCHER VERLAG, 1927).

of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism as a radical movement focusing on subversive articulations of change during the inter-war years.

Karl Schlögel writes in *In Räume lesen wir die Zeit* (2003) that “history is enacted not only in time, but also in space”,⁷ an observation that summarises how we can, and perhaps should, examine historical processes as they have been enacted in “the space”. But, what do the anti-imperialist space and the LAI represent and of what do they consist? This is crucial when it comes to assessing and understanding the history of political movements and international

⁷ Karl Schlögel, *Im Räume lesen wir die Zeit. Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2003), p. 9.

organisations. The aim here is twofold, firstly, to introduce existing and other potentially crucial turning points and frameworks in the interpretation of the LAI as an international organisation between the wars, and secondly, to reassess the historiography of the LAI. Historiography is, first and foremost, an undertaking that devotes itself to bringing coherence and a structure to past interpretations and writings.⁸ Previous writings on the LAI's history are typical of the kind of narratives that have contained empirical pitfalls and erroneous interpretations. However, it must be noted that this contention does not include everything that has been written on this topic, although the need to compile and write the LAI's historiography does partly aim to recover its "lost history". Josephine Fowler highlighted in her study of Japanese immigrants and international Communism how the search for and the understanding of "lost history" contributes to the filling in of the gaps or silences in the historical record on questions and subjects that belong to the global history of labour, Communist and radical movements during the inter-war years.⁹

A re-assessment of the LAI's historiography includes a mixture of historiographical trends and narrative perspectives. The central challenge here is the inclusion of nostalgia as a pivotal aspect in an understanding of the organisation's existence from 1927 to 1937, and how the LAI has been perceived and described since 1937. This article introduces a range of perspectives, e.g. the archival revolution of the 1990s, theoretical assumptions and frameworks, as well as methodological hazards, including an empirical and chronological survey of the LAI's history. The LAI, if we approach it from a nostalgic point of view, cannot be fully explained if we do not take into account the context of international Communism between the world wars, a challenge that relates to discussions of ideology, organisational opportunities and restrictions as well as obligations, and the encounters these imposed upon the individuals actively engaged in anti-imperialist movements. Before it is even possible to introduce and further discuss the LAI's historiography, it is essential to establish what will be referred to here as "the crucial elements and turning points" in the organisation's history. This will in turn be followed by a discussion on how to approach and understand the LAI as a *sympathising organisation* supporting the colonial liberation struggle between the wars, and how the term *nostalgia* adds yet

8 On historiography, see for example John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History* (Oxon: Routledge, 5th ed., 2010).

9 Josephine Fowler, *Japanese and Chinese Immigrant Activists. Organizing in American and International Communist Movements, 1919–1933* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), pp. 12–13.

another layer to this perception. Thus, to write the history of the LAI, one has to understand the broader and finer details of its history.

Crucial Elements and Turning Points in the History of the League Against Imperialism

George Lansbury, the distinguished leader and character of the British Socialist movement, was delayed due to fog in the English Channel on his way to attend the Brussels Congress. On 10 February, the same day as the congress proceedings opened, Lansbury managed to send (by telegraph) a message to the participants, in which he declared that he had high expectations for the possible establishment of “a new International”.¹⁰ On 19 February, Lansbury praised the achievements of the congress in his article “A Great Week-End” in the British Socialist paper *Labour Weekly*. This was entirely based on his experiences both in Brussels and after having travelled to Berlin for further discussions with some of the delegates. According to Lansbury’s colourful description of the congress, the event had shown how “the whole Conference was dominated by the spirit of comradeship and goodwill – that spirit which in an indefinable manner breaks down all barriers of language, race and creed, and makes men understand that they and their interests are all one”.¹¹ The feeling of euphoria, which Lansbury had distinctly experienced at the Brussels Congress, is one crucial element which partly explains both how and why the LAI emerged in 1927 as an international organisation. Despite its promising outlook in February, the LAI was, however, never able to present itself as a global political actor; rather, it depended partly on transnational contacts and connections, and partly on the consent and support of the Comintern for the remainder of its existence.

The second crucial element in the LAI’s history was its relationship with the Comintern and its headquarters in Moscow. Prior to convening the Brussels Congress, the organisational process had involved meticulous preparations, improvised tactics, and strained relations in both directions – between Moscow and Berlin. The latter involved the clashes of interest between Münzenberg’s feverish ambitions to capitalise on the colonial question on the one hand, and the cautious responses from various actors (individuals and institutional departments) at Comintern headquarters on the other. Yet the

10 Gibarti, *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont*, p. 11.

11 George Lansbury, M. P., “A Great Week-End”, in *Labour Weekly*, 19.2.1927, filed in the British National Archives (BNA, Kew, Richmond) HO 144/10693.



Englisch-chinesische Verbrüderung
Lansbury, der 2. Vorsitzende der Labour Party, England, mit Liau,
dem Vertreter der Kuomintang-Partei, China

FIGURE 5.2

An English-Chinese friendship. George Lansbury and Hansin Liau, and observe Münzenberg smiling in the background

SOURCE: LOUIS GIBARTI (HRSG.), *DAS FLAMMENZEICHEN VOM PALAIS EGMONT* (BERLIN: NEUER DEUTSCHER VERLAG, 1927).

fundamental criterion for the establishment of the LAI was conceived not by Münzenberg but by the prominent Indian Communist and national revolutionary Manabendra Nath Roy. On 29 May 1926, in a secret proposal to the Secretariat of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) in Moscow, Roy made the point that the general objective of the “league against colonial atrocities or something similar” should be “to act as a neutral intermediary between the Comintern and nationalist movements in the colonies”.¹² This is one of the definitive points of departures in the LAI’s history. From the Comintern’s perspective, the LAI represented an opportunity to finally create a link between the Communist movement, i.e. between the Bolshevik regime, Comintern headquarters in Moscow and the national sections (the Communist parties, and the mass and sympathising organisations in Europe and the USA) on the one side, and the colonial and semi-colonial countries on the other. The colonies were inaccessible regions (in most cases) for the Comintern to

¹² (Confidential) Letter from ECCI Secretariat (author: M.N. Roy), Moscow, to Münzenberg, Berlin, 29/5–1926, filed in Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii (Russian State Archive for Social and Political History; RGASPI) 542/1/3, 10–11.

transplant ideas and movements, mainly because of the prohibitive measures adopted by colonial security services, for example, the French, British or the Dutch in order to curtail the global spread of Communism.¹³

Münzenberg himself represents the third crucial element. It was through his vision and administrative skills that the very idea of even organising an international congress against colonialism and imperialism came to fruition. A renowned Communist, but first and foremost acting the role as the charismatic leader of the IAH, Münzenberg observed in 1925 the need to broaden the political scope of the organisation by including the colonial question on its agenda. This was particularly so after the launching of the successful proletarian solidarity campaigns *Hands off China* (Hände weg China!) in Germany in June–July 1925. This campaign proved the possibility of uniting broad political layers into a united front against colonialism across Europe, and it could also serve as a means of spreading Communism to the colonies. This led to a deeper interactive process on the colonial question between Münzenberg's IAH in Berlin and specific institutions at Comintern headquarters, particularly the Eastern Secretariat, in Moscow.¹⁴

The leader of the Labour and Socialist International (LSI), the Swiss Socialist Friedrich Adler, described Münzenberg as the “*spiritus rector*” of the LAI. The LSI emerged after the Brussels Congress as one of the leading antagonists against the LAI, and in October 1927, Adler launched an open attack against the growing influence of the LAI in the European Socialist movement. In the LSI's report “Zur Geschichte der Liga gegen koloniale Unterdrückung” (*On the History of the League Against Colonial Oppression*), Adler presented a critique of the LAI as being a subversive and dangerous organisation that was closely linked to the Bolshevik regime in the Soviet Union.¹⁵ The primary function and aim of this report was to send out a warning to every affiliated member of the LSI not to associate itself with the LAI. However, if we choose to see and interpret Münzenberg's role only as the “*spiritus rector*” of the LAI, this merely reproduces a fraction of what the LAI represented, what the organisation accomplished, and what it failed to achieve during its existence.

Much of the above is explained by including a fourth crucial turning point: the archival revolution in Russia and Germany in the 1990s. The former director of the Russian State Archive for Political and Social History (RGASPI)

13 See for example Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence. Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

14 Petersson, “*We Are Neither Visionaries Nor Utopian Dreamers*”.

15 “Zur Geschichte der Liga gegen koloniale Unterdrückung”, *Internationale Information* IV:52 (1927), pp. 438–448.

in Moscow, Kirill Anderson, eloquently elucidated the basic principle of this revolution in 2002, by stating how the declaration of the “openness of archival information” in Russia in October 1991 had made it possible for scholars on Communism and other radical movements to critically test the myths and legends of global Communism by visiting this archive. Eric D. Weitz had, however, already in his book *Creating German Communism* (1997) observed that, despite the opening of previously closed archives in both Germany and Russia, few novel perspectives had managed to challenge existing approaches to the history of Communism. Yet, as historian Alexander Vatlin’s comprehensive studies on the Comintern have shown, it is now possible for “legends and myths” to co-exist with the continuous growth of academic works on the “world party” and global Communism as a phenomena.¹⁶ What this archival revolution has done for the study of international Communism and twentieth-century radicalism is to put some of the historical facts into their proper context, and to uncover formerly hidden narratives that are, inescapably, a part of this history. The end of Cold War politics succeeded in bringing the previously, and intentionally, concealed links and relations between the LAI and the Comintern out into the open.

The fifth crucial element involves the understanding of the LAI as an international organisation. It is essential to understand the growth of and increasing role of international organisations during the twentieth century if one wants to analyse movements of ideas, patterns and people. Akira Iriye writes in *Global Community* (2002) that “international non-governmental organisations in the field of cultural and intellectual exchange” are never definitely clear-cut cases. The LAI’s history is partly explained by Iriye’s contention. While it may seem bold to propose that the LAI was a non-governmental organisation (NGO), it was, nonetheless, an organisation that operated outside governmental restrictions despite its close links to the Comintern. It can, therefore, be suggested that the LAI corresponded to the ideal and ambition of trying to change the world in the post-war milieu of the First World War (1914–1918), attempting to find solutions to the problems that were challenging nations and social systems. In fact, the Communist and Socialist movements eagerly sponsored the convening of congresses, conferences and protests, as much as these movements organised a number of organisations, associations and committees

16 Kirill Anderson, “A New Life for the Comintern Archives”, *Comma* 3–4 (2002), pp. 157–158; Eric D. Weitz, *Creating German Communism. From Popular Protest to Socialist State, 1889–1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 12; Alexander Vatlin, *Die Komintern. Gründung, Programmatik, Akteure* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2009), p. 9.

during the inter-war years.¹⁷ As much as the LAI tried to function and act as an international organisation, a central feature of each and every one of the crucial elements in the LAI's history is the perception of the organisation as being a "sympathising organisation" in support of the colonial liberation struggle. This important factor provides a clue as to how and why the Comintern expected that the establishment of the LAI would create a viable anti-imperialist platform from which it could gain access to anti-colonial movements in the colonies. Thus, the LAI was inexorably a part of the Comintern's vision of "creating not just a Communist world, but also a world of Communism", borrowing here Tim Rees' and Andrew Thorpe's well-expressed conclusion on the Comintern's higher ideals.¹⁸ Yet, this denotes the further implications of the Comintern's genealogy and its implications on the LAI's lifeline, i.e. its ever-changing objectives and policies (Bolshevisation, Stalinisation, the united front, class against class, and the popular front strategies), and how these affected the scope of a sympathising organisation that was striving to build bridges between political groups and labour movements in the "imperialist nations" on the one hand and the oppressed peoples in the colonies on the other.

The Communist "Solar System": Sympathising Organisations and the Dilemma of Interpreting the Front

How can we approach and understand a phenomenon such as the sympathising organisation? In order to answer this question, it is essential to include some of the frameworks already discussed, i.e. the hidden organisational and ideological links between the sympathising organisation and its main benefactor which, as in this case, was the LAI's interlinked relationship both to the Comintern and to the international Communist movement. Why is it relevant to even ponder the question of the sympathising organisation and its functions? In order to both understand the LAI's ideological foundation and structural relationships and to reveal the Comintern's motives for establishing the LAI in 1927, it is essential to address the functionality and instrumental use of the sympathising organisation as a political and social phenomenon in the history of twentieth-century Communism. This involves, above all, questioning

17 Akira Iriye, *Global Community. The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 14, 23, 29.

18 Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe, "Introduction", in Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe (eds.), *International Communism and the Communist International 1919–43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 10.

the erroneous description of the sympathising organisation merely as a *front organisation*. This form of terminology was both introduced and kept alive by the antagonists to Communism prior to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, particularly by national governments and their security services, or through spokespersons of the international Socialist movement. Just as the Labour and Socialist International and Adler had fulfilled their mission of warning the European Socialist movement about the LAI in 1927, other actors continued to do so and were equally prolific. The British Socialist William Gillies (1884–1958), Secretary of the Labour Party's "International Department", had been a close collaborator with Adler in exposing the LAI's Communist connections in 1927. In 1933, Gillies further developed the Socialist understanding of the sympathising organisation as being a front for Communism in the pamphlet *The Communist Solar System: The Communist International*. By dissecting the Comintern's "united front" strategy, Gillies wanted to convey to the reader how "the front", in the shape of sympathising organisations, was just "Communism in disguise" and tactical manoeuvres by the Bolshevik government. Gillies referred to Münzenberg as "the true inventor of the 'sympathising mass organisations'", yet, at the same time Gillies claimed that Münzenberg disrespected those who got involved in these "Innocents' Clubs". According to Gillies, the term "sympathising" had a double meaning, both that the organisation was sympathetic to Communism and that it was antipathetic to Labour and Socialist parties. Focusing on identifying and describing "the planets in the Communist solar system" (see further below), Gillies introduced a general history of the LAI, mentioning how the organisation had ties to other organisations and committees such as the Meerut Prisoners' Release Committee (1928–1933) and the Amsterdam-Pleyel Anti-War Movement (1932–33).¹⁹ A different survey of Communist front organisations was provided in Adolf Ehrt's violently anti-Communist book *Der Weltbolschewismus* in 1936, a detailed and graphic book which expressed the view of world Communism as a sanctioned conspiracy, orchestrated by Stalin and the Bolsheviks in Moscow. The antagonism in Ehrt's book becomes even more self-evident when one realises that the book was published by the Nazi publishing company "Anti-Komintern" in Berlin. However, the message of this book furthered the understanding of sympathising organisations as being mere fronts for Communism.²⁰

19 William Gillies, *The Communist Solar System: The Communist International* (London: Labour Party, 1933).

20 Adolf Ehrt, *Der Weltbolschewismus. Ein internationales Gemeinschaftswerk über die bolschewistische Wühlarbeit und die Umsturzversuche der Komintern in allen Ländern* (Berlin: Anti-Komintern, 1936).

The phraseology of the sympathising organisation as a front continued after 1945, manifesting itself as a permanent attitude amongst those who approached, analysed and wrote about the different characteristics and features of international Communism. This is, above all, a historiographical tradition moulded upon the Cold War division of the world and the writing of history, embodied by the totalitarian paradigm, which epitomised the sympathising organisations as being “fronts” for Soviet foreign policy interests.²¹ This Cold War traditionalism, and its perception of global and political history, has, by designating the LAI only as a front for Communist activities, blotted out what the organisation partly and initially set out to be: a sympathising organisation in support of both the colonial liberation struggle and anti-colonial/imperialist movements, and partly an organisational instrument initiated and sponsored by the Comintern to act as an intermediary between itself and nationalist movements in the colonial and semi-colonial countries.

This duality in the understanding of the LAI as a sympathising organisation poses several questions. Firstly, the sympathising organisation should not be perceived in general terms as being an *organisation*, i.e. as a unified and permanent constellation.²² On the contrary, by its advocacy of the term *sympathising*, the Comintern envisioned a strategy which could be deployed

21 The volume and total number of writings and works that describe the LAI as a “front organisation” is vast. Examples that have contributed to establishing the understanding of the sympathising organisations as “communist fronts” are, aside from Gillies’ pamphlet mentioned above, Elizabeth Kirkpatrick Dilling, *The Red Network: A “Who’s Who” and Handbook of Radicalism for Patriots* (Chicago, 1934, reprinted New York: Arno Press, 1977). On a curious note, Dilling’s book was a self-financed effort which aimed to define the anti-Communist disposition of the author *vis-à-vis* the American Communist movement. The report by the Joint Fact-Finding Committee, supported by the Senate of the USA, *Fourth Report on Un-American Activities in California: Communist Front Organizations* (1948) more or less confirmed the perception of communist organisations as “fronts”, arguing that “front organizations are indispensable” to supporting and establishing “the ‘vanguard position’ of Communism and to pose as the only true friend of the ‘struggling masses’” (p. 25). See also Louis Nemzer, “The Soviet Friendship Societies”, *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 13:2 (1949), pp. 265–284.

22 The general understanding of an organisation is not that it is a random and chaotic entity, but rather, an organisation is perceived as being a coherent entity that exists and functions around systems of rules and objectives, in co-existence with administrative and hierarchical structures, which is required to meet and challenge changes “in unanticipated ways”, see further in Clive Archer, *International Organizations*, London, 1983, pp. 1–2, pp. 128–141; Gareth Morgan, *Images of Organization. Executive Edition* (London: Sage Publications, 1998); Michael Barnett & Marha Finnemore, *Rules for the World. International Organizations in Global Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

to circumvent suspicion and prohibitive measures by governmental authorities and agencies, but which could primarily be used to attract attention and support from circles outside the Communist movement. This leads us to the principal aim of the sympathising organisation: to extend Communist influence amongst the masses which could be found within the European Left-wing movement: Socialists, anarchists, radical pacifists and intellectuals. This idea of the sympathising organisation was initially based upon Lenin's theoretical belief after the Bolsheviks had seized power in Russia in 1917 that, with the ensuing turbulence in Soviet Russia and the short period of War Communism, ending in 1921, which had left the country shattered on all levels, in order to foment the global spread of Communism, one had to rely partly on the urgent establishment of organisations, associations and committees in order to amass moral and material support for the "Soviet experiment". Lenin coined this organisational procedure as the establishment of "transmission belts", i.e. organisations, committees or associations that were to function as intermediary institutions for the Communist party. Lenin realised at an early stage that the Communist movement, especially in connection with the formation of national Communist parties (sections) in Europe and beyond, depended on the construction of interactionist links between the Communist party and the masses.

The challenge for Lenin, and later for the Comintern after its inception in 1919, was how to attract attention from political, cultural and social circles outside the Communist movement, e.g. one method was to target propaganda at a special cause or question in those spheres. Focusing on the Comintern's vision and expectations of the sympathising organisation, this was essentially an organisational design which should devote itself to finding contacts within the core of the Left-wing movement, e.g. workers, radical pacifists, petit bourgeois and intellectuals. The Comintern's *lingua franca* described this form of organisation as "auxiliary" (*podsobnyye*) and "camouflage organisations" (*maskiruyuschiye organizatsii*) or as a "cover" (*maska, skryvat'*). In its very essence, Lenin's concept of "transmission belts" and the use of auxiliary organisations confirmed the realisation of the Comintern's "united front" strategy after 1923, launched after the dreadful attempt by the German Communists to seize power in October 1923. The preferred method and theoretical framework of the sympathising organisation was finally introduced at the Sixth ECCI Plenum in Moscow (17 February–15 March 1926) by Otto W. Kuusinen, a Communist émigré from Finland and a distinguished Secretary within the Comintern apparatus. At this plenum, as noted in Kuusinen's "Report of the Commission for Work among the Masses", the basic principles and aims of the "sympathising mass organisation" were re-defined in line with the theory of the "Solar

System", which had sprung out of the conception of strengthening the international Communist movement by creating "not only Communist organisations, but other organisations as well". The objective of these organisations, established in line with the "solar system" policy, was primarily to exert Communist influence over the masses, with the "sympathising mass organisations" having as flexible an organisational structure as possible and "not being under mechanical leadership", Kuusinen argued. The sole motive behind this was to allow these organisations and smaller committees to orbit around the Communist Party, but still remain "under the influence of our Party [Comintern]".²³ Kuusinen's "solar system" theory assumed historical proportions, and has been used both by antagonists (William Gillies, see above) and academics in the portrayal of the Comintern's "united front" strategy "from below".

The academic study of both the sympathy and moral support extended by Western intellectuals towards the Soviet Union during the inter-war years reveals the dynamics and intentions of both the Soviet government and the Comintern in relation to these sympathising organisations. Ludmila Stern's and Michael David-Fox's studies are good examples of this. What needs to be further accentuated, as highlighted both by Stern and David-Fox, is that the sympathising organisation obviously kept its ties to the Comintern concealed from the public, leaving the Comintern to assume the role as a silent leader. What specific characteristics can be attributed to the type of sympathising organisations set up by the Comintern for a sole purpose?

First of all, they were by their very nature "focus-centred" organisations, including, for example, educational and curricular activities with a focus on the study of the Marxist-Leninist perception of society as a whole, or through a given political or geographical topic: e.g. war veterans' organisations, sport associations, theatre groups, questions of gender, pacifism and anti-colonialism, which could either be organised in the form an organisation, committee or association. Secondly, the leadership of these sympathising organisation was crucial for the Comintern in getting these organisations off the ground, i.e. the public portrayal of the organisation depended on the willing participation and benevolence of non-Communist actors, who preferably already had

23 Ludmila Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union, 1920–40* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 43–45; Bernhard S. Morris, "Communist International Front Organizations", *World Politics* 9:1 (Oct.1956), pp. 76–87. For the Sixth ECCI Plenum and the discussion on the "sympathising mass organisations", see "Resolution on the Development of Methods and Forms of the Organisation of Masses under the Influence of the Communist Parties", *Inprecorr* 6:40 (1926), pp. 649–650; (Otto W. Kuusinen) "Report of the Commission for Work among Masses", *Inprecorr* 6:28 (1926), p. 429.

a prominent position within their own political contexts. By accomplishing the above, the LAI became a prolific example, after the Brussels Congress, of what could be achieved, although the internal leadership – the real governing apparatus – included individuals carefully selected by the Comintern. Hence, while the official number of well-known Communists as acknowledged members was kept at a minimum, the sympathising organisation was in reality governed by a so-called “Communist fraction” (*kommunistische Fraktion; kom.Fraktion*). The sole reason for this was to get the Communists to supervise and control its organisational and political work, which can be divided in two parts: to ensure the inclusion of the slogan “in defence of the Soviet Union”, and to highlight the undertakings of the Bolsheviks to build socialism within the Soviet Union which, in a broader context, was clearly an expression of the continual Bolshevisation and Stalinisation of the international Communist movement during the inter-war years.²⁴

The second explanation is of a more laconic and pragmatic nature which can plausibly be applied to every sympathising organisation established within the Communist “solar system”. Prominent Communists involved in realising the establishment and continuation of the LAI in the aftermath of the Brussels Congress, e.g. Münzenberg and the Japanese Communist Sen Katayama, considered it to be crucial for the longevity of the organisation that it remained “steady in our hands”.²⁵ Hence, the sympathising organisation was not only a “cover” for other agendas; it was also a platform for control and internal power struggles. Furthermore, the LAI was one of several cultural and political organisations linked to the network of sympathising organisations created under the Comintern’s bewildering web of organisations, e.g. the Friends of the Soviet Union (established 1927), the Anti-Fascist League (1923), the International Association of Revolutionary Writers (1930) and the Anti-War Amsterdam-Pleyel

24 Stern, *Western Intellectuals*, pp. 44–45; Michael David-Fox, “The Fellow Travellers Revisited: The ‘Cultured West’ through Soviet Eyes”, *The Journal of Modern History* 75 (June 2003), pp. 300–335. See also Hannah Arendt’s ground-breaking study of totalitarianism for a typical example of the “front” paradigm, published after World War II, in which she observed that the “first glimpse of a totalitarian movement [is] through its front organisations”, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1985; first edition 1951), p. 367.

25 See for example, Letter from Münzenberg, Berlin, to Müller/IAH office, Moscow, 26.1.1925 [sic, 1926], RGASPI 538/3/47, 9–13; Letter from Münzenberg, Berlin, to the ECCI Secretariat, Moscow, 21.2.1927, RGASPI 542/1/7, 120–123; Information regarding the Press Organ of the LAI (English version), Katayama, submitted to the ECCI Secretariat, 24.1.1928, RGASPI 495/18/613, 20–23.

Movement (1932).²⁶ The sympathising organisation should also not be confused with the Communist mass organisation. The Comintern created and supported mass organisations such as Münzenberg's IAH, the proletarian defence organisation International Red Aid (in Great Britain and the USA: International Labour Defence), and the radical trade union Profintern (Red International of Labour Unions). A fundamental distinction between the sympathising organisation and the mass organisation is that while the former aimed its activities at a specific issue, the latter aimed its activities at society as a whole.²⁷

Uses of Nostalgia: Implications and Repercussions on Memory

The history of the LAI has partly been explained through the utilisation of nostalgia as a historical concept. As the definitions of colonialism and imperialism share the heuristic understanding of oppression as basic points of departure,²⁸ can the nostalgia of anti-imperialism be discussed if we apply this concept to the LAI as a historical object? If we understand the LAI to be a constituent part both of the global history of anti-imperialist movements and, as Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier suggest, in the broader discussions of movements, then the ideas and practices of the LAI can be included as part of the narrative dealing with how oppositional political movements succeeded in challenging the existing world order from the end of the nineteenth century and onwards.²⁹ The suggestion is as follows: the nostalgia of anti-imperialism has been used as a means of reinforcing a belief in the past, present and future of resistance struggles against colonialism and imperialism, with the LAI assuming a pivotal role in the history of twentieth-century anti-colonial resistance and decolonisation. Furthermore, the history of the LAI can be written either from an organisational or a political perspective, however the focus here is to ascertain where the LAI has been placed in terms of ideology, or as a source of inspiration. Some writings on nostalgia and its historical

26 The presentation of various sympathising organisations is given in Petersson, *"We Are Neither Visionaries Nor Utopian Dreamers"*, p. 49.

27 Petersson, *"We Are Neither Visionaries Nor Utopian Dreamers"*, pp. 48–49; Gregory J. Kasza, *The Prescription Society. Administered Mass Organizations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 7.

28 For colonialism and imperialism, see further in Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism. An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001).

29 Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier, "Introduction", in Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier (eds.), *Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements, 1880s–1930s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 10.

implications argue, from the point of view of anti-colonialism, that the “anti-colonial struggle yearns for a return to the pre-colonial”, a conclusion drawn by social geographer Alastair Bonnett, who continues by stating that once colonial power had been seen as a “rupture” and “moment” for those who were affected by it, symbols were developed that aroused feelings for the return to a lost and independent past.³⁰ The LAI became caught up in this nostalgia of independence once Sukarno in Bandung 1955 included the Brussels Congress in 1927 as a congregation of people not “assembled there by choice, but by necessity” (see also Figure 5.3).³¹

It seems as though the distinction between historical oppression and the resistance against oppression can be combined with visions of how to achieve independence, a crucial postulation for the understanding of decolonisation during the post-war era. The *Nehruvian* concept of the Third World and the NAM is explicit in this case, which, in Bandung, showed the momentous result of even introducing the feeling of “Third World solidarity”.³² However, this only strengthens the understanding of nostalgia as a state of mind emphasising “semantic vagueness, drift and ambiguity” as it yearns “for a different and previous time/place/experience”.³³ Sukarno did not in 1955 yearn for a re-enactment of the Brussels Congress, although the event and political agenda which the LAI succeeded in introducing in 1927, is significant from the perspective that it illustrates Sukarno’s reference to a different time and place, which in Bandung, had turned into reality. Thus, this suggests how we can interpret the Brussels Congress partly as the beginning of something “new”, as much as Bandung can be interpreted as the end-game of inter-war anti-imperialism.

Sukarno was not the only person who remembered the Brussels Congress and the LAI. Other individuals, who had either been closely involved or engaged in the organisation, put their experiences into words. Reginald Orlando Bridgeman (1884–1968), a British Socialist and pacifist with a background as a British diplomat in Teheran, had been the Secretary of the British LAI section since its inception in 1927, and in 1933 was granted authority to assume leadership over the organisation after its operative centre had been transferred first from Berlin to Paris, and then definitely to London. As an ardent protester against British colonialism and imperialism since the early 1920s, Bridgeman had a central role in advancing anti-imperialism as a practice. Yet, at a time

30 Bonnett, *Left in the Past*, p. 96.

31 McTurnan Kahin (ed.), *The Asian-African Conference*, p. 40.

32 Lee, “Introduction”, p. 15.

33 Dennis Walder, *Postcolonial Nostalgias. Writing, Representation, and Memory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 9.

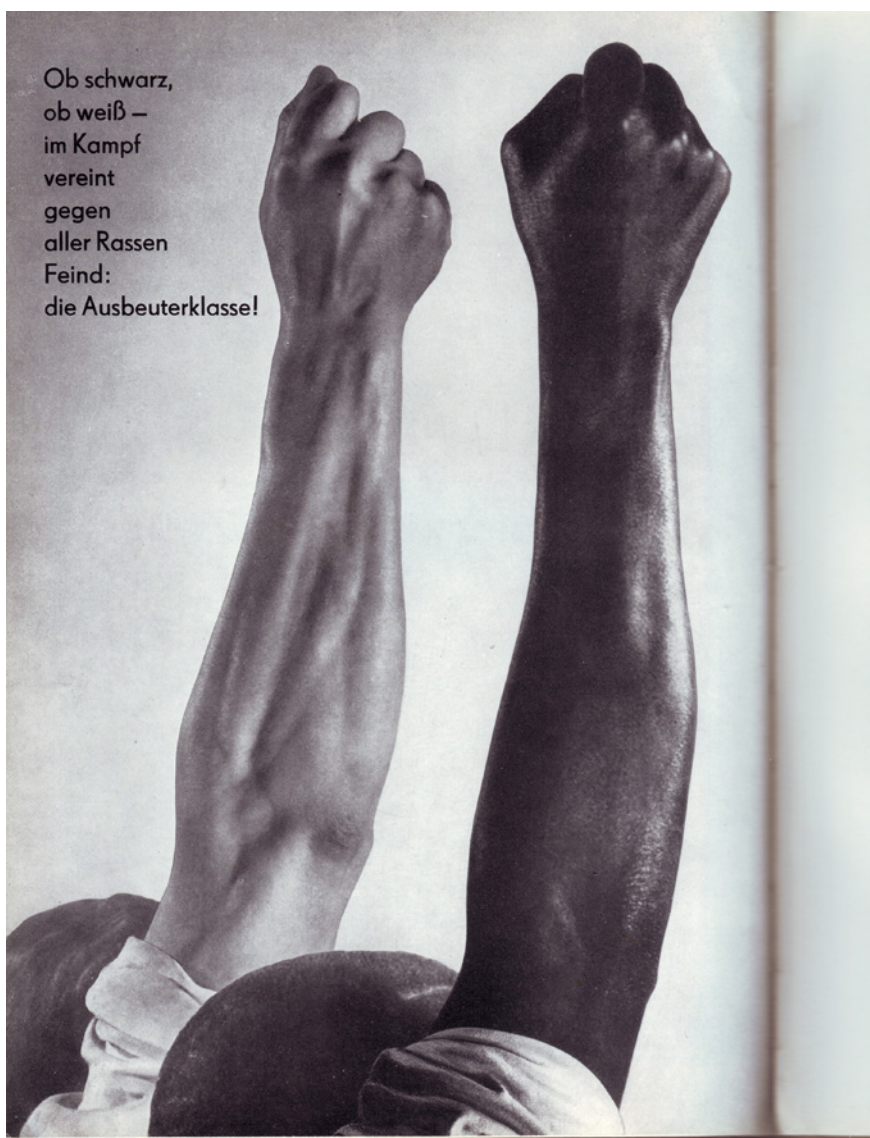


FIGURE 5.3 *Projecting anti-imperialist unity between the wars*

SOURCE: *ARBEITER-ILLUSTRIERTE ZEITUNG*, JAHRG.X (BERLIN: NEUER DEUTSCHER VERLAG), NR.26, 1931.

when interest in the LAI was gradually declining and interest in the Popular Front increasing during the 1930s, Bridgeman together with LAI secretary and member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) Ben F. Bradley, sent out an open letter on 11 May 1937, giving notice of the impending dissolution

of the organisation. This letter offers one of the first glimpses of nostalgia for the LAI:

Since its foundation in 1927 the League Against Imperialism has done consistent work in connection with the different aspects of the colonial struggle; but it is essential that we should advance from the position of a small group of people interested in the colonial struggle, seriously restricted in their activities because of their association with a “banned organisation”, and activate the working class organisations and peace societies, [...] In order that this work can be co-ordinated, it is agreed that the offices and resources of the League Against Imperialism shall be utilised henceforward as a Colonial Information Bureau.³⁴

Thus, the fact that the LAI’s “consistent work” had contributed to the colonial freedom struggle was a pivotal landmark for coming resistance movements against imperialism. Yet, Bridgeman and Bradley also seemed to notice that the organisation was but one step in a longer historical process.

The life and political career of the Indonesian nationalist, Mohammad Hatta, is one worth retelling. Hatta was living and studying in the Netherlands in the 1920s and, as a leading figure in the Indonesian nationalist movement Perhimpunan Indonesia, attended the Brussels Congress as its accredited delegate. At the congress, Hatta was able to meet distinguished leaders of the European Left-wing movement, e.g. Edo Fimmen from the Netherlands and leader of the International Transport Workers’ Federation, the British Socialist and leader of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) James Maxton, as well as Münzenberg. Elected as a member of the LAI Executive Committee at the end of the congress, Hatta returned to the Netherlands and wrote down his impressions of the event, stating that “[N]ever before had the world seen such a congress gather”. His euphoria did not, however, last long. In 1929, Hatta resigned as leader of Perhimpunan Indonesia and, in 1932, he returned to Indonesia to resume the anti-colonial struggle with Sukarno. Within these three years, Hatta had been excluded from the LAI in 1930, accused of being reformist rather than

34 John Saville, “The League Against Imperialism, 1927–1937”, in *Dictionary of Labour Biography, Volume VII* (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), pp. 45–46; A copy of the full letter, which Saville refers to, has been found in the papers of historian Hans Piazza, henceforth referred to as the Hans Piazza Collection (HPC, LAI documents collected by Piazza in 1980s–90s), and consulted by the author in March 2015 in Berlin.

revolutionary.³⁵ Yet, this proves how memory changes and assumes a different character over time. On 30 August 1945, just thirteen days after Indonesia had won its independence from both the Dutch and Japanese imperialists, after more than 300 years of predominantly Dutch colonial rule, both Hatta and Sukarno could pose as the leaders of the Indonesian liberation movement. It was in this context that he published the article “A personal message to my old comrades wherever they may be” in the nationalist paper *Indonesia Merdeka* (A Free and Independent Indonesia), a text that commemorated and reflected upon his years in Europe in the 1920s. According to Hatta, “those champions of humanitarianism” who had rallied against colonialism and imperialism in Europe had left a life-long legacy on his life, with the Brussels Congress having been a conference of “world importance”.³⁶ The impact of Brussels had, so it seems, created for Hatta an experience that he could refer and return to, but this also implies, as Dennis Walder writes in *Postcolonial Nostalgias*, how “history is what might rescue” an idea, experience, or practice.³⁷

It seems, therefore, that the LAI’s history functioned as a nostalgic reference for Hatta as he both described and dealt with how the world had changed since the Brussels Congress, or, in line with how Bridgeman felt towards the LAI’s legacy, it constituted a central source for the continuance of the colonial liberation struggle. Furthermore, this indicates that Hatta must have played a crucial role in shaping Sukarno’s understanding of the LAI as it was expounded in Bandung nearly thirty years later after the Brussels Congress. Commonly known as the “Bandung Moment”, the Bandung conference was seen as somewhat of a continuance of Brussels, with its emphasis on the necessity to critically question the longevity of global imperial structures and colonialism. As much as nostalgia sheds light onto the links between Brussels, the LAI and the “Bandung Moment”, this historical process can be seen as a celebration and “culmination of a process” that had commenced in Brussels in 1927.³⁸

Yet the legacy and heritage left by the LAI in the history of 20th century anti-imperialism remains an unresolved puzzle. Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette

35 Mohammad Hatta, “The Brussels Congress against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression and our Foreign Propaganda”, in Deliar Noer (ed.), *Portrait of a Patriot: Selected Writings of Mohammad Hatta* (The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1972), pp. 158–164. Taken from *Indonesia Merdeka*, 1927; for Hatta’s expulsion from the LAI, see Petersson, “*We Are Neither Visionaries Nor Utopian Dreamers*”.

36 “A personal message to my old comrades wherever they may be”, in Hatta 1972, p. 504. For Indonesia’s independence, see Merle Calvin Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia Since c.1200*, Third Edition (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, pp. 261–264.

37 Walder 2011, p. 9.

38 Lee, “Introduction”, pp. 1–32; Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, p. 32.

Burton's eloquent study of global empires and transnational connections mentions how, for example, the LAI was "expressly designed to link anti-colonial movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America" but that it proved to be an "ultimate failure" as it failed to achieve any of the above.³⁹ However, neither Ballantyne nor Burton mentions the fact that both the LAI and the Brussels Congress were crucial elements in the attempt to centralise anti-colonial movements active in Europe, and not exclusively for and in the colonies. Yet, both the success and failure of the organisation are far more complex and intricate than so, i.e. focus should rather be on trying to see beyond its failures in reaching out to the colonies. The history of the LAI involves an intricate web of relations, developments, ideas and struggles for political recognition and internal power. Nostalgia is not what might "rescue" the LAI's history; a critical assessment of its factual history is more likely to do this by evaluating its origins, history and various contexts. To do so, one has to begin by assessing first, what other writings on the LAI have focused on, and then begin the process of interpreting and understanding the dynamics and scope of the organisation in its historical context.

Previous Research: Biographies, Transnational Perspectives, Methodological Nationalism and Empirical Pitfalls

The Comintern and its internationalist message of both working for and defending the principles of national self-determination was, in the beginning, representative of the opposition against the existing world order after 1919. Thus, from a historiographical point of view, the topics and questions raised by the Comintern have yielded a scholarly community that has tried to understand this social, political and cultural phenomenon in a multitude of academic studies. As Robert J.C. Young writes in *Postcolonialism. An Historical Introduction* (2001), between the wars anti-colonial activists utilised the radicalism and "powerful strain of resistance to colonialism and imperialism" that emerged with the impetus of Socialism and Communism. The history of the LAI is representative of how to understand the essential attitude and politics of anti-imperialism in the twentieth century, Young states.⁴⁰

39 Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, "Empires and the Reach of the Global", in Emily S. Rosenberg (ed.), *A World Connecting 1870–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 420.

40 Young, *Postcolonialism*, p. 100.

With the archival revolution in Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the chances of analysing, interpreting and understanding twentieth-century anti-imperialism increased in the first years of the 1990s, with the paradigm of the Cold War division of the world facing immediate confrontation. What can be agreed upon is that the consequences of the political and demographical change in both Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, particularly with the literal disintegration of state Communism in first the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1989 and then the Soviet Union in 1991, forced the opening of closed and secret archives in both Berlin and Moscow. This made it possible to conduct research into and produce critical re-assessments of the structural and ideological implications of national and international Communism.⁴¹ While not every gap in the historical record of the Comintern has yet been filled, the remaining work is a continual process. For example, one of the first critical investigations into the LAI's structure and activities, as presented in my doctoral dissertation *"We Are Neither Visionaries Nor Utopian Dreamers". Willi Münzenberg, the League against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925–1933* (2013), has contributed to filling in one of these gaps and has thus renewed interest in an organisation that has largely been forgotten. As historian Peter Martin remarked in his study of Germany's colonial past and the movements against this system in the Weimar republic: "the interest in this organisation has, for a long time, been at a low ebb".⁴²

Previous research into the LAI has been essentially restricted by limitations on accessing documents, cursory generalisations, or for that matter, biased conceptions. In 1993, John D. Hargreaves concluded, after having consulted several documents located in the LAI *fond* [collection] in the Comintern Archive in Moscow (RGASPI), that access to Russian archives had "greatly enhanced possibilities for research" into anti-colonial movements and the LAI. Hargreaves' reflection more or less fulfilled John Saville's prophecy from 1984, which lamented the lack of the basic prerequisites needed to conduct a "comprehensive evaluation" of the LAI and its ties to anti-colonialism: gaining access to the archives in the Soviet Union. Yet in 2008, Jonathan Derrick concluded that

41 During the first years of the 1990s, this increase in empirical sources resulted in a wide variety of rich studies, see Weitz, *Creating German Communism*, p. 12; Apollon Davidson, Irina Filatova, Valentin Gorodnov, John Sheridan (eds.), *South Africa and the Communist International: a Documentary History. Volume 1, Socialist Pilgrims to Bolshevik Fightsoldiers, 1919–1930* (London: Frank Cass, 2003).

42 Peter Martin, "Die ‚Liga gegen koloniale Unterdrückung“, in Ulrich van der Heyden, Joachim Zeller (Hrsg.), „...Macht und Anteil an der Weltherrschaft“. *Berlin und der deutsche Kolonialismus* (Berlin: Unrast Verlag, 2005), pp. 261–269.

the challenge involved in assessing anti-colonial Movements had only just begun, emphasising that, with the “closer study of episodes, themes or individuals” in inter-war anti-colonial activism and organisations, the history of the LAI would finally establish itself in this history.⁴³ Mustafa Haikal’s chapter on the LAI in the ground-breaking anthology *Aufstieg und Zerfall der Komintern* (1992) nonetheless represents a distinctive point of departure in the study of the LAI after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This was the first critical assessment of the LAI, based on documents from the Comintern Archive in Moscow, with Haikal’s pioneering effort having both disclosed patterns of disintegration and introduced the first cursory, but still, a coherent chronology of the LAI. In 1995, Haikal continued to re-define his observations of the LAI in the anthology *Willi Münzenberg: ein deutscher Kommunist im Spannungsfeld zwischen Stalinismus und Antifaschismus* (1995), with a chapter focusing on Münzenberg’s pivotal role within the organisation.⁴⁴

Haikal’s understanding of the LAI is illustrative of having belonged first to, and then departed from, the East German historiographical tradition of “politics of biography” after the collapse of Communism. This method of writing history was endorsed and sanctioned in East German academia in the 1960s solely for the purpose of producing the history of the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED; Socialist Unity Party of Germany). Haikal shared this academic tradition with Hans Piazza, the acting editor of the anthology *Die Liga gegen Imperialismus und für nationale Unabhängigkeit* (1987), published to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the LAI, issued by the History Department at Karl-Marx-Universität in Leipzig. In his foreword, Piazza concluded that “the history and actuality of a little-known anti-colonial world organisation” remained to be told, yet what could be conceded at this stage was that the LAI was “motivated by the desire” to end “barbaric colonial rule and act in solidarity against imperialism”, an undertaking nonetheless characterised by “varying consequences”. As noted above, Haikal and Piazza continued to

43 John D. Hargreaves, “The Comintern and Anti-Colonialism: New Research Opportunities”, *African Affairs* 92:367 (Apr., 1993), pp. 255–261; Saville, “The League Against Imperialism”, pp. 40–50; Jonathan Derrick, *Africa’s “Agitators”. Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918–1939* (London: Hurst & Company, 2008), p. 5, 180–185.

44 Mustafa Haikal, “Die Kommunistische Internationale und die ‚Liga gegen Imperialismus und für nationale Unabhängigkeit‘”, in Theodor Bergmann/Mario Keßler (Hrsg.), *Aufstieg und Zerfall der Komintern. Studien zur Geschichte ihrer Transformation (1919–1943)* (München: Podium Progressiv, 1992), pp. 239–252; Mustafa Haikal, “Willi Münzenberg und die ‚Liga gegen Imperialismus und für nationale Unabhängigkeit‘”, in Tania Schlie, Simone Roche (Hrsg.), *Willi Münzenberg: ein deutscher Kommunist im Spannungsfeld zwischen Stalinismus und Antifaschismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995), pp. 141–153.

develop their research into the LAI after 1991; however, the significant difference was that they now had access to the documents in Moscow. In Piazza's chapter "The Anti-Imperialist League and the Chinese Revolution" (2002), he conceded that "the documents ... shed new light on the history of the AIL [LAI], which has enabled me to revise my previous view of the subject".⁴⁵ The dogma of shedding new light on the history of international Communism is, therefore, the key, i.e. this makes the history of the LAI inescapably a part of the history of the Comintern.

This makes it necessary to introduce both former and current theoretical approaches used by scholars in order to interpret the Comintern's structural dynamics, e.g. the centre and periphery model, the Cold War tradition of the totalitarian perspective, with the latter framework having been criticised by the 1960s revisionist school. This so-called revisionist school was itself further developed, both prior to and after the fall of Communism, in comparative and prosopographical approaches.⁴⁶ Currently, the study of the Comintern is the

45 Catherine Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries. German Communists and Their Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 10; Hans Piazza (Hrsg.), *Die Liga gegen Imperialismus und für nationale Unabhängigkeit 1927–1937. Zur Geschichte und Aktualität einer wenig bekannten antikolonialen Weltorganisation* (Leipzig: Karl-Marx-Universität, 1987), p. 5; Hans Piazza, "The Anti-Imperialist League and the Chinese Revolution", in Roland Felber, A.M. Grigoriev and Mechthild Leutner (eds.), *The Chinese Revolution in the 1920s. Between Triumph and Disaster* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 166–176. Other examples of biased research into the LAI are Grigorii Zakharovich Sorkin, *Antiimperialisticheskaya liga, 1927–1935. Istoricheskii ocherk* (Moscow: Glav Nauka, 1965); A.I. Sobolev ("Head of group"), *Outline History of the Communist International*, Institute of Marxism-Leninism, Central Committee of the CPSU (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971). One recent contribution to the study of the LAI is Jürgen Dinkel, "Globalisierung des Widerstands: 'Antikoloniale Konferenzen und die Liga gegen Imperialismus und für nationale Unabhängigkeit 1927–1937'", Sönke Kunkel & Christoph Meyer (Hrsg.), *Aufbruch ins postkoloniale Zeitalter. Globalisierung und die außereuropäische Welt in den 1920er und 1930er Jahren* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2012), pp. 209–232.

46 The corpus of literature on the Comintern is too vast to mention here, although examples of the above are: Milorad M. Drachkovitch & Branko Lazitch (eds.), *The Comintern: Historical Highlights – Essays, Recollections, Documents* (New York: Praeger 1966); Fernando Claudin, *The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975); Matthew Worley (ed.), *In Search of Revolution – International Communist Parties in the Third Period* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004); Rees and Thorpe (eds.), *International Communism*; Mikhail Narinsky and Jürgen Rojahn (eds.), *Centre and Periphery. The History of the Comintern in the Light of New Documents* (Amsterdam: IISG, 1996); Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen & Andrew Flinn (eds.), *Agents of the Revolution. New Biographical Approaches to the History of International Communism in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005).

quintessence of a topic where “legends and myths” co-exist with document editions, academic assessments, dissertations and the partial disclosing of the Comintern Archive on the Internet.⁴⁷ We can nevertheless trace this long line of research back even to when the Comintern was in existence. Franz Borkenau, the German Communist who turned towards anti-Communism, published one of the first critical assessments of the Comintern, *The Communist International* (1938). Despite Borkenau’s study being somewhat dated and biased, it introduced one of the recurring structural themes in the study of the Comintern: the world party was a “puzzling phenomenon” which depended on “the firm hopes of the Communists”.⁴⁸

The LAI is also a puzzling phenomenon; however, this calls for the structuring of viable approaches before we can even begin the journey of assessing how the LAI has been interpreted. A constructive departure is to discuss the vast corpus of biographical literature and memoirs which either focus on or include individuals who had some connections to the LAI. This critical examination reveals, however, that a majority of these works have produced an erroneous understanding of the LAI. Focusing on Münzenberg’s prominent position in the LAI, both as the instigator and developer of the anti-colonial project, his political *persona* is at the heart of Babette Gross’ biography *Willi Münzenberg. Eine politische Biographie* (1967). Furthermore, the convenience of Gross having written Münzenberg’s biography was particularly fitting considering that she was also Münzenberg’s fiancée and confidant both throughout his career in the Comintern and afterwards. However, the book focused essentially on Münzenberg’s political activities, not his personal opinions or tribulations within the international communist movement. Further, this can also be reiterated in relation to Gross’ sister, Margarete Buber-Neumann, who wrote two books

47 Vatlin, *Die Komintern*, p. 9. The Comintern Archive has a history in itself. Formerly known as the Institute for Marxism-Leninism, and the Central Party Archive in Moscow, hence, with the archival revolution in 1990s, the idea to digitise part of the collection was introduced. The so-called INCOMKA (*International Committee on the Project of Computerization of the Comintern Archive*) was a joint project launched on the initiative of the *Federal Archival Service of Russia* (Rosarchiv), and the *International Council on Archives* (ICA) in 1996. The original plan was to digitise a minor part of the holdings in the Comintern Archive (not the *fonds* of Communist parties) to make the archive more “visible”. The Comintern Archive consists of approximately 220,000 collections/*fonds* (between 20 and 25 million documents), and the INCOMKA project has digitised approximately 1 million documents. For quantitative data, see Internet: <http://www.osa.ceu.hu/db/fa/381.htm>. Today the entire Comintern Archive is located as a sub-section in the Russian documentary collection on Soviet history, see <http://sovdoc.rusarchives.ru>.

48 Franz Borkenau, *The Communist International* (London: Faber and Faber, 1938), p. 413.

on the Comintern and European Communism, *Von Potsdam – Nach Moskau* (1957) and *Kriegsschauplätze der Weltrevolution* (1967), in which she describes, from a personal perspective, her experiences of both the German Communist movement and the Comintern. Despite Gross' and Buber-Neumann's cursory narratives of the LAI, they still represent captivating depictions of the LAI, with the former retaining its prominent place as some kind of political testament to Münzenberg, and the latter providing an intriguing insight into the world of Communism during the inter-war years.⁴⁹ Gary L. Ulmen's detailed biography of German Sinologist Karl August Wittfogel in *The Science of Society* (1978) is well worth including in this discussion. Wittfogel was, at an early stage, involved in shaping the LAI's public agenda in 1927, especially the Chinese question, and Ulmen's appraisal of Wittfogel relates both the ideological and organisational difficulties which emerged within the LAI and at the LAI's International Secretariat in Berlin.⁵⁰ However promising George Padmore's book *Pan-Africanism or Communism* (1956) may seem to be in his description of the LAI, the Pan-Africanist visionary and one-time Communist activist (during his tenure in Germany and Moscow in the 1920s and in the first years of the 1930s) provides a diluted understanding of the intentions of the German Communist movement to capitalise on the colonial question in the 1920s, although Padmore concedes that Münzenberg had a central role in realising the LAI as both a political and an organisational project.⁵¹ A concluding example is A. Fenner Brockway's autobiography *Inside the Left* (1942), which describes in great detail both the euphoria of the Brussels Congress and Münzenberg's

49 Babette Gross, *Willi Münzenberg. Eine politische Biographie* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1967), pp. 196–210; Margarete Buber-Neumann, *Von Potsdam Nach Moskau. Stationen eines Irrweges* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1957), pp. 97–110; Margarete Buber-Neumann, *Kriegsschauplätze der Weltrevolution. Ein Bericht aus der Praxis der Komintern 1919–1943* (Stuttgart: Seevald Verlag, 1967), pp. 299–307. Buber-Neumann worked as a steno-typist at the LAI International Secretariat in Berlin in 1927.

50 Gary L. Ulmen, *The Science of Society. Toward an Understanding of the Life and Work of Karl August Wittfogel* (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), pp. 80–85, 103–105. Wittfogel was initially responsible for the curricular activity and colonial courses which the LAI International Secretariat organised in Berlin and Frankfurt am Main, acting also as leader of the German LAI branch in Frankfurt am Main and, finally, as editor of the LAI organ *The Anti-Imperialist Review*.

51 George Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company City, 1971), pp. 300–307. Padmore and Reginald Bridgeman, the British Socialist and Secretary of the British LAI Section, established a long-lasting relationship in connection with the activities of the LAI and the anti-imperialist movement, see, for example, James D. Young, *Socialism Since 1889. A Biographical History* (New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1988), pp. 159–160.

“master strokes” of dramatisation, and how the LAI for a short period succeeded in unifying the anti-imperialist movement in Western Europe. Yet, the LAI remains a diluted feature in Brockway’s depiction of the organisation, mostly due to the fact that the Labour and Socialist International forced Brockway to resign from the LAI.⁵²

Biographical works focusing on Münzenberg’s life and career in the European Communist movement both contribute to and continue to build on the established misconceptions of the LAI. Two books particularly have helped to produce a distorted view of the LAI: Stephen Koch’s sensationalist study *Double Lives* (1994) and Sean McMeekin’s academic attempt in *The Red Millionaire* (2003). Koch portrays the LAI erroneously. The reason for this is his lack of proper source criticism, which results in Koch producing a brusque categorisation of the LAI as an “instrument for propaganda, sabotage and espionage” and he fails to discuss how he has reached this conclusion. McMeekin’s biography is essentially a re-make of Gross’ “political biography” of Münzenberg, but he also strongly opposes Koch’s “careless polemic” and “dramatic claims” concerning Münzenberg’s life and political career. Yet McMeekin’s analysis is burdened by its prejudice towards Münzenberg as a person and character, promoting the idea that Münzenberg was an unabashed, calculating and stern believer who promoted Communism only to fulfil his own needs by embezzling vast amounts of money from the Bolsheviks in Moscow. In McMeekin’s description of the LAI, one gets the (wrongful) understanding, based on a misreading of Gross, that the organisation was dissolved when the theoretical journal of the LAI, *The Anti-Imperialist Review*, had to momentarily cease its publication in 1929. What is even more baffling, particularly considering that both Koch and McMeekin have used and analysed documents in the Comintern Archive in Moscow,⁵³ is that the misconceptions produced in these two accounts leave the reader with more questions than answers. The world is still waiting for the

52 A. Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left. Thirty Years of Platform, Press, Prison and Parliament*, Second Edition (London: George Allen & Unwin, [1942] 1947).

53 Stephen Koch, *Double Lives: Stalin, Willi Münzenberg and the Seduction of the Intellectuals* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), p. 64; Sean McMeekin, *The Red Millionaire. A Political Biography of Willi Münzenberg, Moscow’s Secret Propaganda Tsar in the West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 208, 310 (see footnote 3), 348 (see footnote 15). The most astonishing remark is how McMeekin likened Münzenberg and the Comintern to the “world’s most formidable terrorist organisations” of today, i.e. “Islamic terrorists” (p. 307). This is not only a bold suggestion; it is a comparison that gives lip service to speculations. Criticism against both Koch and McMeekin’s portrayal of Münzenberg can be found in Michael Scammel’s article in *New York Review of Books* (3/11–2005, pp. 32–35), and Tania Schlie’s review of Koch’s book in *Die Zeit* (Nr.8, 1994, 18/4–1994).

definitive biography to be written of Münzenberg's life and career, a narrative that would assist in both correcting and adding more depth to the political activities essentially created by him during the inter-war years.

Nirode K. Barooah's biography *Chatto: The Life and Times of an Indian Anti-Imperialist in Europe* (2004) is, when compared to both Koch and McMeekin, therefore a refreshing contribution to the LAI's history. Virendranath Chattophadyaya's (Chatto; 1880–1937) life and career in the LAI, first as a national revolutionary promoting Indian independence, utilising his prominence of acting as LAI International Secretary (1928–31), and later, as a Communist, is carefully approached and examined by Barooah. This makes Barooah's contributions one of few which sheds some new light onto the activities of the LAI and its struggle to establish international anti-imperialist activism. The enormous amount of research presented in Barooah's biography is impressive, an archival journey stretching back over thirty years. While Barooah's findings and conclusions cannot be refuted, some parts of his narrative include either ambiguous or vague discussions of relevant events in the LAI's history. This is due to the fact that Barooah, in some cases, depended on secondary sources.⁵⁴

Thomas Kampen presents a similar understanding of individuals active in the LAI in his article, "Solidarität und Propaganda: Willi Münzenberg, die Internationale Arbeiterhilfe und China" (2004). Kampen focuses on the life of Hansin Liau, a Chinese Communist and functionary at the International Secretariat, a person who epitomised the essential anti-imperialist activist at the Brussels Congress, and was afterwards appointed by Münzenberg to lead the short-lived propaganda experiment, the Chinese National Agency, in Berlin in 1927. Both Münzenberg and the IAH are also given central roles as, according to Kampen, they were both crucial in the initiation and consolidation of the Chinese proletarian solidarity campaigns in Germany in the 1920s. The LAI was, of course, a part of this, although Kampen also recognises that the LAI served the dual purpose of engaging anti-colonial activists and of providing them with organisational and political experience.⁵⁵

54 Virendranath Chattophadyaya (Chatto) acted as "International Secretary" of the LAI from 1928 to 1931; he was executed in Moscow in 1937. Nirode K. Barooah, *Chatto. The Life and Times of an Indian Anti-Imperialist in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 246–282. See also Jawaharlal Nehru's own account of the LAI in Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography with musings on recent events in India* (London: The Bodley Head (1936) 1953). For a thorough biography on Nehru, which includes a shorter passage on Nehru's contacts with the LAI and Chatto, see Benjamin Zachariah, *Nehru* (London: Routledge, 2004).

55 Thomas Kampen, "Solidarität und Propaganda: Willi Münzenberg, die Internationale Arbeiterhilfe und China", *Zeitschrift für Weltgeschichte. Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven* 5:2 (2004), pp. 99–105.

Throughout its existence, the LAI attempted to set up active and vigorous sections in the “imperialist countries”, e.g. across Europe and in the USA. Its national sections, existing at least on paper, were administered by the LAI International Secretariat in Berlin, and did carry out a varying range of activism. Have there been any studies done on the LAI’s national sections? The apparent lack of research into the LAI’s sections is indicative of the insufficient understanding of the LAI’s international ambitions, although there are several notable exceptions. In Barbara Bush’s study of resistance movements against British imperialism in Africa, a brief introduction is provided to the activities and political nature of the LAI section in Great Britain and its members, e.g. Bridgeman, the Communist and Member of the British Parliament Shapurji Saklatvala, the Socialists James Maxton and Ellen Wilkinson, as well as the pacifist Vicar Conrad Noel. However, it is in Jean Jones’ (1996) and Kate O’Malley’s (2003) studies that the central narratives on the LAI in Great Britain and Ireland can thus far be found.⁵⁶

The LAI also had an active national section in Weimar Germany, an actor deeply involved in protesting against the pro-colonial movement as it emerged in the country in the aftermath of the degrading PEACE settlement in 1919. The German LAI Section did, however, only continue what its forerunner (League Against Colonial Oppression; LACO) had initiated, i.e. the LACO had been trying to connect itself with the German pacifist and anti-war movements in 1926. The connection between anti-imperialism and pacifism is further discussed by Susanne Heyn in “Der kolonialkritische Diskurs der Weimarer Friedensbewegung zwischen Antikolonialismus und Kulturmission” (2005). Similar exposés are found, for example, in Henrick Stahr’s study of German journalism and how the themes “Exotismus und Rassismus” were used to explain the colonies in Germany during the inter-war years, while in his dissertation, Joachim Nöhre assesses the nature of the pro-colonial movement in Weimar Germany. The former is a good example of a discursive analysis of the public campaigns initiated by the IAH to broadcast a political and social attitude towards the Negro question.⁵⁷ Jennifer Anne Boittin’s study of inter-war anti-imperialism

56 Barbara Bush, *Imperialism, Race, and Resistance. Africa and Britain, 1919–1945* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 238–239; Jean Jones, *The League Against Imperialism* (Preston: Socialist History Society, 1996); Kate O’Malley, “The League Against Imperialism: British, Irish and Indian Connections”, *Communist History Network Newsletter* 14 (Spring 2003) <http://les1.man.ac.uk/chnn/CHNN14P.html>.

57 Susanne Heyn, “Der kolonialkritische Diskurs der Weimarer Friedensbewegung zwischen Antikolonialismus und Kulturmission”, *Stichproben. Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien* 5:9 (2005), pp. 37–65; Henrick Stahr, *Fotojournalismus zwischen Exotismus und Rassismus. Darstellungen von Schwarzen und Indianern in Foto-Text-Artikeln deutscher*

and feminism in Paris, *Colonial Metropolis*, eloquently describes the transnational influences of the LAI in the French capital, and how the organisation's discourse of "humanitarian and liberal" ideals promoted a "unified, transnational front of anti-Fascism and anti-imperialism". Yet, Boittin's focus is not on the LAI, as she prefers to refer to the organisation as an inclusive feature in her grander narrative describing the Parisian community as a place for anti-imperialist movements between the wars.⁵⁸ However, in order to begin to understand the geographical extent of the LAI, a comparative evaluation and analysis of its activities on a global scale is required.⁵⁹ This constructive approach is eloquently shown in Daniel Kerssfield's detailed study *Contra el imperio. Historia de la Liga Antimperialista de las Américas* (2012), which traces the genealogy of the LAI's activities in Latin and South America.⁶⁰

From its inception, the LAI aimed to function as a political arena and platform for critical discussions on colonialism and imperialism. Therefore, it is essential to highlight the political nature of the LAI, a statement which suggests (or implies) that the history of the LAI is a political history. Related to this are also the various social and cultural dimensions of anti-imperialism during the inter-war years, e.g. the interconnected transnational flows, relations and networks between the LAI and anti-colonial movements which were used to develop protest campaigns against particular issues (e.g. the Meerut trial 1929–1933),⁶¹ raising awareness of the situation in the colonies as well as in the imperialist power centres in Great Britain, France, the Netherlands or the USA,

Wochenillustrierter 1919–1939 (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovac, 2004); Joachim Nöhre, *Das Selbstverständnis der Weimarer Kolonialbewegung im Spiegel ihrer Zeitschriftenliteratur* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 1997), p. 17.

58 Jennifer Anne Boitin, *Colonial Metropolis. The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Years* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), pp. 101–102.

59 The following has been described in my doctoral dissertation as a process of gathering of "every visionary and utopian dreamer" in the form of the national LAI sections in Germany, Great Britain, India, the Netherlands, the USA and Latin America, see Petersson, "We Are Neither Visionaries Nor Utopian Dreamers", pp. 161–187. I address the transnational spaces of the LAI further in the article "The Limited Transnational Space of the League against Imperialism and for National Independence", in *monde(s) histoire espaces relations* (Presses Universitaires de Rennes, November 2016).

60 Daniel Kerssfield, *Contra el imperio. Historia de la Liga Antimperialista de las Américas* (Mexico: siglo veintiuno editores, 2012).

61 Michele L. Louro, "Where National Revolutionary Ends and Communist Begins: The League Against Imperialism and the Meerut Conspiracy Case", in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 33:3 (December 2013), pp. 331–344.

for example, all of which indicates that the LAI deserves to be included in the subaltern understanding of resistance against colonial oppression.⁶²

As already mentioned, the LAI is a topic that has, to a limited extent, been included in local, regional and national studies on anti-imperialist movements in an “imperialist” context (e.g. the LAI sections). The subaltern approach may also contribute to revealing how the LAI functioned as a source of inspiration in mobilising anti-colonial movements, a proposition which broadens the study from merely understanding the LAI as a disseminator of Bolshevik propaganda and supporter of Soviet foreign policy. By looking at the LAI from a different perspective, and not exclusively from a Western and Eurocentric point of view, we can assess and discuss the phenomena and contexts of the organisation in a new light. Priya Chacko writes about Jawaharlal Nehru’s political persona as one that emerged as a mixture consisting of “the internationalist nationalist”, a result partly of his experience after having attended and actively participated at the Brussels congress in 1927.⁶³ Such a departure in assessing and understanding the different layers and perspectives connected to the LAI, enhances the creation of a larger history that fully details the organisation’s history. Further, the research into Pan-Africanism and the African nationalist movements is a good example of this, focusing on the study of both the Black Belt movement in the USA and the Negro liberation movement in Europe, research that introduces the understanding of the LAI as both a moral supporter of Negro liberation movements and as a functional link for the international Communist movement. This framework emerged in Imanuel Geiss’ ground-breaking study, *Panafricanismus* (1968), which showed that both the LAI’s anti-imperialism and the message espoused by the Communist movement contributed to consolidating the struggle against colonialism in Africa, but that this also represented an ideological alternative to the Pan-Africanism advocated in the distinguished writings and organised political Pan-African congresses of W.E.B. du Bois and Marcus Garvey in the inter-war years. J. Ayodele Langley continued to build on Geiss’ framework, proposing new ideological and organisational patterns in the history of Pan-Africanism and African

62 For the subaltern approach, see further in Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Legacies of Bandung: Decolonization and the Politics of Culture”, in Lee (ed.), *Making a World after Empire*, pp. 45–68.

63 Priya Chacko, “The internationalist nationalist. Pursuing an ethical modernity with Jawaharlal Nehru”, in *International Relations and Non-Western Thought. Imperialism, colonialism and investigations of global modernity*, Robbie Shilliam (ed.) (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 178–196.

nationalism, and how the LAI functioned as a central actor in developing this political discourse. Yet it was only after the archival revolution in Russia in late 1991–1992 that scholars were finally able to revise and critically evaluate the political and organisational natures and links between international Communism, African nationalism, the LAI and other pivotal anti-imperialist organisations, e.g. the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW, Hamburg 1930), the Negro Welfare Association (NWA, London 1931) and the Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre (League for the Defence of the Negro Race; LDRN, Paris 1927).⁶⁴ This was an undertaking carried out by scholars such as Hakim Adi, Robbie Aitken, Mark Salomon, or in various research projects, for example “Comintern and African Nationalism, 1921–1935”, initiated at Åbo Akademi University by Holger Weiss. A vast amount of research has been done since the 1990s, which has revealed the links between the LAI and European Communism and Black radical movements in both European, African and transatlantic contexts.⁶⁵

Research into the history of nationalist independence movements in the colonies during the inter-war years is often inextricably linked to the study of international Communism and its links to national situations, e.g. the growth of the Communist movement in India is a typical case. This contextual framework mentions the LAI as a contributing factor in the development of an anti-imperialist rhetoric that connected India with Europe, but also as a connective link in both co-ordinating and educating anti-colonial activists in Europe. Whilst Barooah's study of Chatto is central to the above, other studies also contribute to establishing a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the

64 See further Chapter 7 of this volume.

65 The Comintern addressed Africa and the Afro-American populations in the USA as the “Negro question”. Imanuel Geiss, *Panafricanismus. Zur Geschichte der Dekolonisation* (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1968), pp. 251–264; J. Ayodele Langley, *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa 1900–1945. A Study in Ideology and Social Classes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 308–310; Bill V. Mullen, “Du Bois, Dark Princess, and the Afro-Asian International”, *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 11:1 (2003), pp. 217–239; Hakim Adi, “Pan-Africanism and Communism: the Comintern, the ‘Negro’ Question and the First International Conference of Negro Workers, Hamburg, 1930”, *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 1:2 (2008), pp. 237–254; Robbie Aitken, “From Cameroon to Germany and Back via Moscow and Paris: The Political Career of Joseph Bilé (1892–1959), Performer, ‘Negerarbeiter’, and Comintern Activist”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 43:4 (2008), pp. 597–616; Mark Salomon, *Cry Was Unity. Communists and African Americans, 1917–1936* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998); W. Burghardt Turner and Joyce Moore Turner (eds.), *Richard B. Moore, Caribbean Militant in Harlem* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Holger Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic. African American Agency, West African Intellectuals and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

LAI in India. For example, Hans-Bernd Zöllner's doctoral dissertation on the Burmese nationalist movement highlights the LAI's engagement in supporting Jawaharlal Nehru's political journey, an observation introduced by Nehru himself in his *An Autobiography* (1936), which was later confirmed in Sarvepalli Gopal's monumental biographical work *Jawaharlal Nehru. A Biography Volume One 1889–1947* (1975).⁶⁶ Nevertheless, it is through the political and subaltern interpretation of Sobhanlal Datta Gupta in *Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India 1919–1943* (2006) that a more nuanced picture of the LAI's activities in India emerges. Gupta's analysis confirms the understanding of the LAI as it is usually depicted, even in spite of the archival revolution in Russia, i.e. an organisation that is commonly interpreted as having been both an enigma and a source of inspiration in the history of anti-colonialism and international Communism. This is a question further highlighted in the anthology *The Internationalist Moment* (2015), edited by Benjamin Zacharia, Ali Raza and Franziska Roy, which, in Michele L. Louro's contribution stipulates that insofar the "institutional history of the LAI is not especially well studied".⁶⁷ However, earlier interpretations offer ways of bridging this methodological and historical lacuna. Milton Israel's assessment of the Indian nationalist propaganda network in *Communications and Power* (1994) unveils a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the LAI, focusing on its instrumental purpose, namely to develop techniques of communications between the LAI's International Secretariat in Berlin and both Indian activists and organisations in India.⁶⁸ The method Israel has adopted to interpret the LAI corresponds to the idea of assigning the LAI a vital role in the global history of anti-colonialism, which is a framework introduced in the late Josephine Fowler's study of how Japanese and Chinese

66 Hans-Bernd Zöllner, *Birma zwischen "Unabhängigkeit zuerst, Unabhängigkeit zuletzt": Die birmanischen Unabhängigkeitsbewegungen und ihre Sicht der zeitgenössischen Welt am Beispiel der birmanischen-deutschen Beziehungen zwischen 1920 und 1948* (Hamburg: LIT, 2000), pp. 260–261; Nehru, *An Autobiography*; Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru. A Biography, Volume 1, 1889–1947* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975).

67 Ali Raza, Franziska Roy and Benjamin Zachariah (eds.), *The Internationalist Moment. South Asia, Worlds, and World Views 1917–39* (London: Sage Publications, 2015); Louro, "India and the League Against Imperialism: A Special 'Blend' of Nationalism and Internationalism", in Raza, Roy and Zachariah *The Internationalist Moment*, p. 29.

68 Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, *Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India 1919–1943. Dialectics of Real and a Possible History* (Kolkata: Seribaan, 2006); Milton Israel, *Communications and Power. Propaganda and the Press in the Indian Nationalist Struggle, 1920–1947* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). See also John Callaghan, "Storm Over Asia: Comintern Colonial Policy in the Third Period", in Matthew Worley (ed.), *In Search of Revolution. International Communist Parties in the Third Period* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), pp. 18–37.

immigrants organised themselves into associations, committees and organisations within the context of international Communist movements (2007). Fowler's analysis is shrewd from the standpoint that she manages to both define and place the LAI within a migratory, multi-lingual and transnational context, implying that the LAI functioned as a source of inspiration for the anti-colonial movement during the inter-war years.⁶⁹ The multitude of interpretations offers different insights into the dynamics and scope of the LAI as a historical object, and located in juxtaposition to what a detailed and empirical study can offer, what is the outlook on the origins, history and contexts of the LAI?

The League Against Imperialism (1927–1937): Origins, History and Contexts

The LAI was a source of concerted inspiration for the liberation movements in the colonial and semi-colonial countries during the post-war era, as Cold War politics had divided the world between Capitalism and Communism.⁷⁰ This questions the understanding of the LAI as a mere front for Soviet propaganda and covert Communist operations. Yet, this approach involves a series of challenges. Either nostalgia assumes a leading role or a rather more complex and more nuanced approach would involve scrutinising the dynamics of the LAI, which opens up a constructive framework as we try to gain an understanding of its history. Focus here is on the origins, history, and heritage of the LAI. Connected to this is the persistent view that the organisation presented itself as a leading international petitioner against colonialism and imperialism during the inter-war years. Can we see this as a constructive and meaningful way to understand its history? If we follow the argument of historian Samuel Moyn, who states that the connection between anti-colonialism and Communism between the wars was "fateful",⁷¹ it cannot be disregarded that the history of anti-colonialism has partly been written in the context of the Left.⁷²

69 Fowler, *Japanese and Chinese Immigrant Activists*, pp. 1–14.

70 The author is currently working on a monograph on the *League against Imperialism*. The working title for the book is "*The Elephant and the Porcelain Shop*". *Transnational Anti-Colonialism and the League Against Imperialism, 1927–1937* (Leiden: Brill, Historical Materialism Series). This book will focus on, from a transnational perspective, the national and international activities of the LAI, with an emphasis on the LAI's anti-colonial and anti-imperialist propaganda and its interconnected relation to anti-colonialism and international Communism between the wars.

71 Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia. Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2010), pp. 90–91.

72 Bonnett, *Left in the Past*, p. 96.

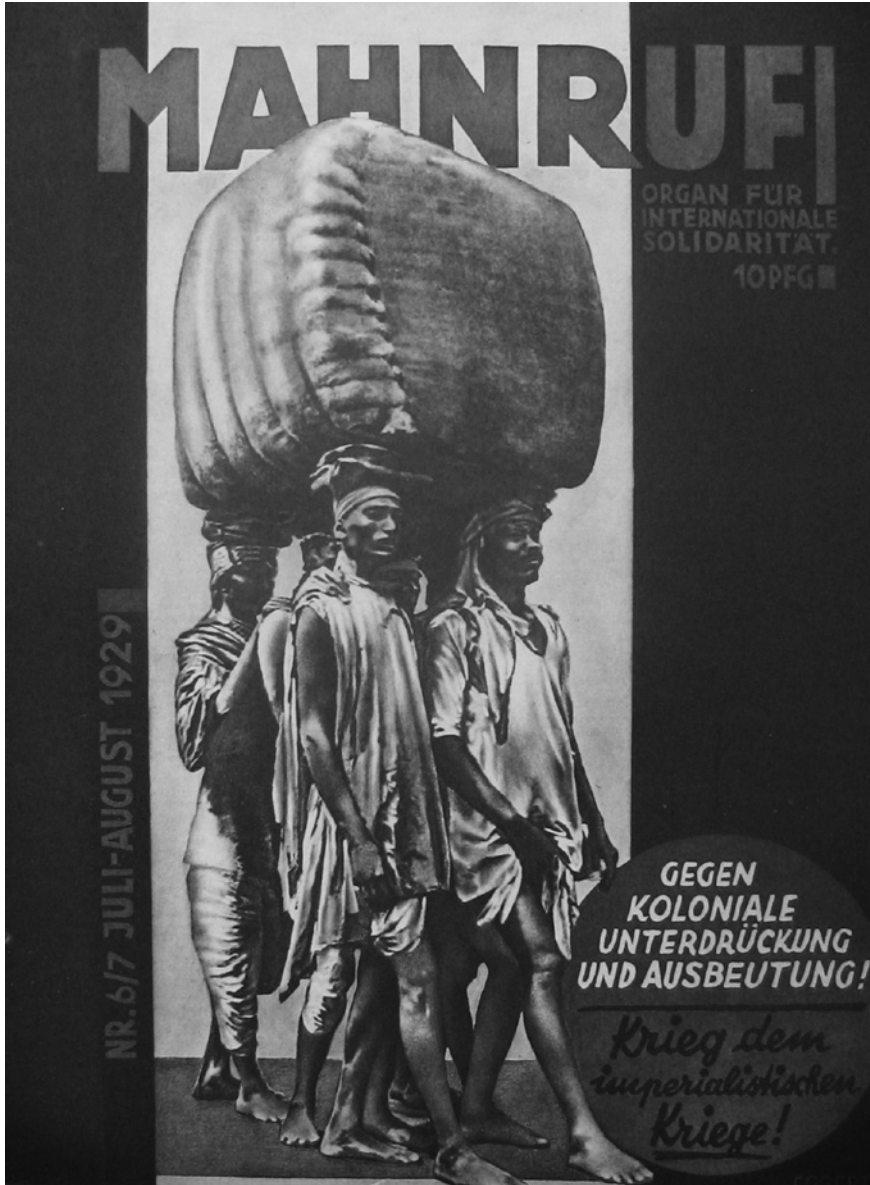


FIGURE 5.4 "Against colonial oppression and exploitation and war against imperialist war." The interlocked nature of anti-imperialist propaganda

SOURCE: COVER OF MAHNRUF. ORGAN FÜR INTERNATIONALE SOLIDARITÄT, NR. 6/7 JULI-AUGUST 1929 (BERLIN: NEUER DEUTSCHER VERLAG).

The LAI was decisive in provoking new ideas and patterns as much as it advanced already established resistance movements against a colonialism which had become politically conscious after the war that was intended “to end all wars”. The global divide and continued template of colonialism had been sanctioned by the victorious powers (Great Britain, France, the USA and, to some degree, Italy) in connection with the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919. Hence, this contributed towards pushing anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements in a more radical direction. While colonial disorder erupted in China, Korea, India and Egypt, and once President Woodrow Wilson’s “moment” began to fade in 1919, and with the establishment of the Comintern in March 1919, the latter offered to some anti-colonial activists an option and solution to their cherished aim of achieving national independence. As Great Britain, France and the USA divided up both Germany’s and the Ottoman Empire’s colonial possessions amongst themselves, labelling them not as colonies but as “mandates”, the procured result yielded patterns of continued discontent for the simple reason that the promises of Versailles were left unfulfilled in guaranteeing the principle of national self-determination. Once the Comintern had introduced itself as the “world party”, this set in motion ideas and visions which corresponded to the colonial liberation struggle and to the internationalism advocated in both Lenin’s and the Bolsheviks’ interpretation of Communism.⁷³

The historical setting above is crucial in order to understand both how and why the LAI was later able to emerge as a voice against colonialism and imperialism (see also Figure 5.4). Two particular sets of theoretical frameworks provide the narrative of the LAI’s history with a coherent structure. Firstly, the concept of space and place is central. After the Brussels Congress, the LAI’s International Secretariat in Berlin assumed the role as the operative centre and administrative hub for its international activities. The radicalism of Berlin offered a place and a setting for the “global village Comintern” during the inter-war years, right up until the Nazi Party’s (NSDAP) ascendancy to power

73 “Anti-Colonialism”, in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin (eds.), *Post-Colonial Studies. The Key Concepts*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 11–12. For the outcome and consequences of the Great War and the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919, see further in Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment. Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia. Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace. The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1989, 2009); Young, *Postcolonialism*; Vatlin, *Die Komintern*.

on 30 January 1933. The connections between Communist and anti-colonial activities in Berlin formed a network of intimate relations with, as Karl Schlögel states, “Red Berlin” representing a radical world which included aspects of political, social, cultural or gender activism. The city should therefore be seen as a stage for anti-imperialism as much as a place where the activities of an organisation such as the LAI could be hidden.⁷⁴ The geographical route between Berlin and Comintern headquarters in Moscow was pivotal for the development of international Communism and anti-imperialism as global movements between the wars. Berlin was a place and a setting that defined both the potential and limitations of political space for anti-imperialist activities. This can be connected to what Eric D. Weitz writes about the *milieu* of German Communists in Berlin and how this group “did not operate” in an environment “of their own choosing”. The spatiality of Berlin as the place for anti-imperial activities defined the organisation of public meetings and protest rallies, administrative and political work, and the question of finding localities which could facilitate the preparation of various tasks. Similar challenges faced the LAI in other colonial metropolises across the world, e.g. in London, Paris, Amsterdam, Hamburg, New York, Chicago and Mexico City.⁷⁵

The second framework comprises both the charismatic personas well known to have been involved in the LAI’s work and also the individuals who have been intentionally excluded from the LAI’s history. Max Weber’s theory on charisma and institutionalisation in the political sphere adds depth to the rationale and behaviour among some of the individuals involved, e.g. Münzenberg’s pivotal role in developing the LAI, or the authority of the Comintern’s decision-makers in Moscow. According to Weber’s sociological framework, the holder of charisma “seizes the task that is adequate” for him/her and “demands obedience and a following by virtue of his mission”. This reveals how the Brussels Congress could be convened in 1927, and why Münzenberg acted the way he did in his relations with the Comintern. Furthermore, this involves how charisma and authority affect the legitimisation of a political or a social movement. It can therefore be suggested that a charismatic movement is represented by a powerful leader (e.g. Münzenberg), with the individuals in a movement being separated from each other internally and externally, organised through informal, communal and emotional bonds.⁷⁶

74 Karl Schlögel, *Das Russische Berlin. Ostbahnhof Europas* (München: Pantheon, 2007 (1998)), pp. 179–208.

75 Weitz, *Creating German Communism*. p. 6.

76 Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building. Selected Papers*, S.N. Eisenstadt (ed.) (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968, pp. 18–20; Steven M. Buechler,

Origins (1925–1926)

The Brussels Congress held on 10–14 February 1927 was not the beginning.⁷⁷ Münzenberg had already in 1925 come up with the basic plan for an international congress against colonialism and imperialism. As the IAH wanted to broaden its political agenda by including questions of a philanthropic character, an extension that would meet both the expectations of and its obligations to the Comintern, further opportunities for IAH action opened up. One example of this was the momentum gathered after international reactions to the outcome of the textile strike and its violent resolution in the Western protectorate of Shanghai in China on 30 May 1925. By establishing the proletarian solidarity campaign *Hands off China* (Hände weg von China) in Germany, the IAH managed to create a large following by focusing on one particular issue, i.e. the issue of colonialism. According to the German Communist and Münzenberg's close friend, Leo Flieg, the Chinese summer campaign had become a "huge success".⁷⁸ Flieg's reflection summarised the first steps taken by both the IAH and Münzenberg to organise some level of colonial work, and it also reflected the tentative interpretations of political and social developments outside Europe. Furthermore, propaganda was the essential goal and preferred *modus operandi* for Münzenberg who, in 1925, had distinguished himself in Western Europe as the leading architect behind proletarian solidarity campaigns that had managed, to some degree, to unify disparate political camps around one common cause. On the other hand, the Comintern had, since its inception in 1919, struggled to gain a foothold in any of the colonial and semi-colonial countries. Prolific events such as the "First Congress of the Peoples of the East" in Baku in 1920, the heated debate on colonialism and India between Lenin and Manabendra Nath Roy at the Second International Comintern Congress in Moscow in 1920, or the short-lived attempt by the International Colonial

Understanding Social Movements. Theories from the Classical Era to the Present (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2011), p. 34; Sidney B. Tarrow, *Power in Movement. Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 136.

77 The remaining part of this section is a summary of my doctoral dissertation on the LAI (Åbo Akademi University, 2013). References are given if they indicate a particular case, event, or turning-point. Consulted archives are: RGASPI, Moscow; Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv, Zentrales Parteiarchiv (SAPMO BA-ZPA), Lichterfelde, Berlin; Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz/GStA_PK, Berlin; Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (IISG), Amsterdam; the British National Archives (BNA), Kew Gardens, London; Stockholm City Archives (SCA), Stockholm; and Riksarkivet (RA), Stockholm.

78 Letter from Leo Flieg, Berlin, to Heinz Neumann, Moscow, 26.6.1925, SAPMO-BA ZPA I 6/3/148, 23–25.

Bureau to co-ordinate the colonial work of the European Communist parties under Roy's leadership in Paris in 1924, to mention just a few examples, must be seen as nothing more than failed attempts on behalf of the Comintern. In 1925, therefore, the stage was set for the IAH to include the colonial question on its agenda. As the *Hands off China* campaign progressed over time, culminating with a conference at the Herrenhaus in Berlin on 18 August 1925, Münzenberg realised how the question of China's liberation struggle had turned into a political success through the strong participation of European Socialists, pacifists, and intellectuals. The conference had gathered both non-Communist and Communist delegates from Europe, but Chinese nationalists had also attended and introduced the idea to Münzenberg of organising "an international congress against colonialism" in Brussels. Münzenberg contacted the Chairman of the Comintern, Grigori Zinoviev, and told him that this was an "idea that makes me happy".⁷⁹

The main problem to solve for both Münzenberg and the IAH was how to establish a functional anti-colonial structure, i.e. an organisational platform and forum capable of presenting the concept of the international congress in a comprehensible form, with a clear aim and inspired participation. In spite of the success of the Hands off China campaign, the challenge remained: how to increase interest in Europe and beyond? In December 1925, after Münzenberg's consultation with and receipt of instructions from the Ukrainian Communist and Comintern Secretary Dmitri Manuilsky, the establishment of the Against the Cruelties in Syria Committee in Germany helped to set in motion plans to fulfil the far-reaching objective of convening the congress. This initiative managed to gather the names of numerous intellectuals and Left-wing politicians in Germany, e.g. the author Ernst Toller, the artist John Heartfield, and the theatre manager Erwin Piscator of the Weltbühne in Berlin. It also tied in nicely with the Comintern's position on French imperialism in Syria.⁸⁰

It was not, however, enough just to organise committees and campaigns. For Münzenberg, the overall objective was to establish a platform from which the challenge of launching the international congress first as an idea, and second in reality, could be realised. In January 1926, Münzenberg introduced the organisational pattern that would lead to the linking together of the IAH's anti-colonial project with the Comintern's Eastern Department (re-named in 1926 as the Eastern Secretariat). Münzenberg's far-reaching objective was to

79 Letter from Münzenberg, Berlin, to G. Zinoviev, Moscow, 18.8.1925, RGASPI 538/2/27, 108–109.

80 "Gegen den französischen Imperialismus – für das Volk Syriens", *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz* 57 (1924), p. 692.

convince the Comintern to support a preparatory plan for an international congress, an event which could assist the Comintern in gaining a base within anti-colonial movements in Europe. Through both the IAH's and Münzenberg's networks, invitations to a conference in Berlin scheduled for 10 February 1926 which aimed to address the question of an international congress against colonialism and imperialism, were sent to individuals, associations, trade unions, and to anti-colonial activists living in the city.⁸¹

The Rathauskeller Conference, 10 February 1926

"The will to centralise the [anti-colonial] movement, not only into a conglomeration of all the fighting and liberal forces in the East and the West is frequently declared. This is a determined historical process that must unite and concentrate leaders of the colonial struggle, the labour movement and the intellectuals – therefore the Colonial Congress".⁸²

Forty-six invited delegates representing Socialist, Communist and anti-colonial movements in Berlin, attended the Rathauskeller Conference on 10 February 1926. The principal result of this conference was that the IAH was granted the authority to transform the moral and political messages expounded in the Chinese and Syrian campaigns into an extensive anti-colonial organisation, the League Against Colonial Oppression (LACO; Liga gegen koloniale Unterdrückung; see Figure 5.5). With Berlin recognised by the delegates as the centre of the anti-colonial movement in Europe, the process of co-ordinating and finding people who were eager to assist and co-ordinate the twofold work in both preparing the congress and disseminating anti-colonial propaganda was, however, only just beginning. At this point, Münzenberg did not yet envision the idea of creating "a permanent organisation [...] against colonial atrocities or something similar", words put into print by Roy in Moscow after reviewing the results of the Rathauskeller Conference, and approved of by the Executive

81 Einladung. Mittwoch, den 10.d.M [February, author's remark], abends 6 Uhr im Spandauer Zimmer des Berliner Ratskellers (Berliner Rathaus, Königstr.), Sekretariat G/F, Berlin, 5.2.1926, RGASPI 542/1/4, 1.

82 Original quote: "Der Wille nach Zentralisierung der Bewegungen, noch einer Zusammenballung aller kämpfenden und freiheitliche Kräfte in Ost und West ringt offen nach seinem Ausdruck. Es ist ein unbezwingbarer geschichtlicher Prozess, der die Strömungen des kolonialen Kampfes, der Arbeiterbewegung und des freien Intellekts zusammenschweißt, und konzentriert – darum Kolonialkongress"; Louis Gibarti, "Warum Kolonial-Kongress", in *Der koloniale Freiheitskampf. Mitteilungsblatt der Liga gegen Unterdrückung*, Nr. 3, Berlin, 5.7.1926, SAPMO-BA ZPA R 3003/ORA/128, 29–30.

Committee of the Comintern.⁸³ Münzenberg would later summarise his aims for the congress in a letter to the ECCI Secretariat in Moscow. On 21 February 1927, he concluded that the event had served the dual purpose both of creating a massive demonstration against colonialism and imperialism, and of finding recruits for Communism.⁸⁴

The interaction between Münzenberg and the Comintern in preparing for this congress throughout 1926 proved to be both tedious and prone to

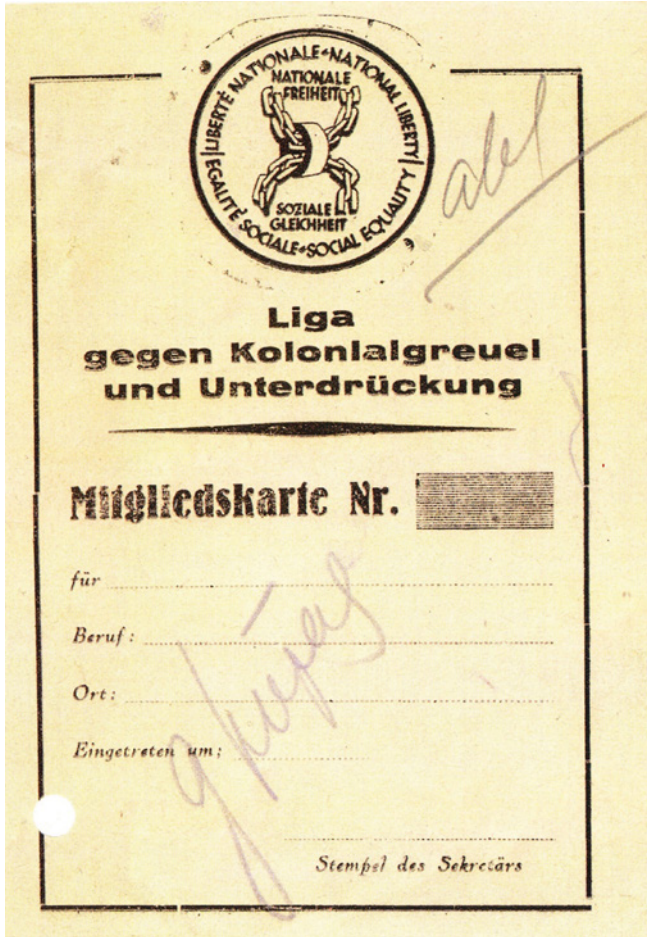


FIGURE 5.5 *Membership card of the League Against Colonial Oppression*
SOURCE: OWN COLLECTION.

83 Resolution from the Commission of Examination on the Question of a Colonial Conference in Brussels, Moscow, 30.3.1926, RGASPI 495/18/425, 32–33.

84 Report from Münzenberg, Berlin, to Sekretariat der Komintern, Moscow, 21.2.1927, RGASPI 542/1/7, 120–123.

conflict. Münzenberg's vision of convening the congress at any cost, despite being forced to postpone the event on several occasions, resulted in a tense relationship with the decision-makers at Comintern headquarters, but also, at home in Berlin when it came to his relations with the KPD Secretariat. Nevertheless, Münzenberg's right-hand-man in co-ordinating this work, the Hungarian Communist and LACO Secretary Louis Gibarti (real name: Laszlo Dobos, 1895–1967), succeeded in convincing the Belgian Socialist and Foreign Minister Emile Vandervelde to allow the LACO to organise the “First International Congress Against Colonialism and Imperialism” in Brussels and, once the Comintern realised that distinguished colonial representatives seemed eager to participate, e.g. Jawaharlal Nehru from India, and Joshua T. Gumede from South Africa and leader of the African National Congress, the road to Brussels was open.

Brussels and the Anti-imperialist Beacon

As the delegates arrived at the “First International Congress against Colonialism and Imperialism” in Brussels at the 16th century Palais d’Egmont on 10 February, each person was handed a pamphlet which contained greetings from distinguished individuals such as Albert Einstein, who would be nominated as LAI Honorary President at the end of the congress, and who declared in the pamphlet that “at your congress, the solidly united endeavour of the oppressed to achieve independence takes bodily shape”. Gandhi also stated in the pamphlet that, “I wish you, however, from the depths of my heart, every success in your deliberations”, while the French author Romain Rolland concluded that “your Colonial Conference is of the highest importance”.⁸⁵ On 13 February, Münzenberg delivered the concluding speech, reflecting on this “historical moment” in the history of colonialism, summoning delegates from the “imperialist nations” in Europe and the USA together with colonial delegates, having pacifists, Communists, Socialists and trade union officials seated next to each other in order to fulfil the principal aim of the congress:

Today, on this afternoon, it was decided to establish the League against Imperialism [...] The LAI [...] shall invite [...] organisations, parties, trade unions and individuals [...] to lead the struggle against capitalism, imperialist rule, in support of national determination and national independence for every people, and for equal rights for every class and human

85 Adressen an den Kongress gegen Kolonialunterdrückung und Imperialismus Brüssel, 10.2.1927, Palais Egmont, RGASPI 542/1/69, 97–100.

[...] From today, we are no longer a loose conference, but the first international congress of the World League against Imperialism.⁸⁶

Although the Brussels Congress was the culmination of a process that had commenced in 1925, for both Münzenberg and the Comintern the success of the event still came as a surprise. According to Sen Katayama, the unofficial leader of the ECCI Delegation in Brussels, “the Congress made a desired progress to the successful end”, where the “most important feature [...] was the harmony among the delegates and all agreed on the chief purpose and aim of the Congress to fight against Imperialism and for National Independence”.⁸⁷ The congress had received coverage not only in the Socialist and Communist presses, but the liberal and bourgeoisie newspapers had also reported on the anti-imperialist demonstration. As matters drew to a close, the signal was given to establish the LAI as a separate and independent organisation outside the IAH’s jurisdiction. Yet for Münzenberg, the question of turning the LAI’s operative centre in Berlin, the International Secretariat, into a functional operation, still depended on the active support and consent of the Eastern Secretariat in Moscow. In order to capitalise on the euphoria of the congress, no time should be wasted in securing the establishment of national LAI sections: first in the “imperialist countries” (Europe and the USA), and then in the colonies.

The League Against Imperialism and Transnational Anti-imperialism

The first setback for the LAI was the slow reaction from Comintern headquarters on how to proceed and to develop the organisation on an international level. While Münzenberg was in contact with the Eastern Secretariat and the Italian Communist Palmiro Togliatti (“Ercoli”), it was nevertheless through the authority of Osip Piatnitsky, who was in charge of administrative and liaison affairs at Comintern headquarters, that the future direction of the LAI was to be decided, with the formation of the “Anti-Imperialist Commission”. This commission was instructed to work out the political agenda and, in direct contravention of the unanimous decision of the Brussels Congress to free all peoples from colonialism, it was proposed that the LAI should focus its Activities on

86 Transcript of Münzenberg’s speech, Brussels, 14.2.1927, RGASPI 542/1/69, 37–49.

87 Confidential letter from Sen Katayama to “Comrade Petrov” [Fedor Raskolnikov] in Moscow 24.2.1927, RGASPI 542/1/7, 131–132.

“vigorously supporting the Chinese revolution” and establishing “an energetic struggle against the imperialist war threat to the Soviet Union”.⁸⁸

This was happening at the same time as the on-going quest in 1927 to establish national LAI sections. As Berlin more and more assumed the role of the central hub of the anti-imperialist movement in Europe, despite the short-lived controversy between Münzenberg and the Comintern on whether to re-locate the LAI’s International Secretariat to Paris, contacts with anti-colonial activists in London, Amsterdam, Marseilles and Hamburg were vital in the spreading of the understanding of the LAI as a global actor. In France, for example, efforts were taken to establish an active section under the official leadership of the French author Henri Barbusse and the French Communist Jacques Ventadour. From March to June, the LAI organised a couple of demonstrations in Paris, with a focus on the North African liberation struggle and “American imperialism”. The latter had been a topic inspired by the visit to Paris of the Cuban nationalist revolutionary Julio A. Mella, who realised that it was crucial to capitalise on the euphoria of the Brussels Congress in order to avoid “scepticism” gaining a foothold within the LAI.⁸⁹ The Senegalese Lamine Senghor (1889–1927) and member of the French-based *La Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre* had made a successful appearance in Brussels. Senghor was also connected to the colonial section in the *Partie Communiste Français* (PCF) and played a key role in introducing the LAI into France. Yet, both the slow reactions of the PCF in acknowledging the LAI’s role and function within the web of Communist activity and the effective surveillance of the organisation by the French secret service *Sûreté* resulted in many of the LAI’s activities coming to a standstill in the country. Along with Senghor’s death on 25 November 1927, this marked the starting point of the gradual change from success to failure for the LAI in the country.

The British LAI section did not face the same problems as in France, although much depended on convincing the non-Communist members, particularly Reginald Bridgeman, the Socialist A. Fenner Brockway and George Lansbury, that the LAI was not governed and controlled by the Comintern. Gibarti did his best to conceal this link when he told Brockway “our funds are not derived from Russian money [...] We have nothing to hide”.⁹⁰ The British

88 Resolution: ECCI Anti-Imperialist Commission, Moscow, 15.6.1927, RGASPI 495/3/18. The demand to vigorously support of the Chinese liberation struggle was the Comintern’s response to the Kuomintang putsch against its former ally in China, the Communists, in April 1927.

89 Letter from Julio A. Mella, Paris, to Münzenberg, Berlin, 6.5.1927, RGASPI 542/1/18, 19.

90 Letter from Gibarti, Cologne, to Brockway, London, 21.8.1927, IISG LSI Archives 284/4. Lansbury had by this time left the LAI.

LAI section experienced the “Russian connection” as somewhat difficult, and it was only on 7 July 1928 that the LAI could hold its first public conference in London at the Essex Hall. Similar scenarios developed across the world as the LAI tried to establish sections. For example, the LAI’s activities in the USA and Mexico were defined by troubles in either securing funds or sustaining the movement, while its insecure contacts with colonial countries such as India and China increasingly restricted any chance of introducing the LAI in these countries.

In fact, the LAI’s activities can be categorised into three distinct fields: public campaigns against colonialism and imperialism serving the purpose of raising the awareness of particular political events; finding and establishing contacts with anti-colonial activists and drawing them into the anti-imperialist movement; and as an educational centre for anti-colonial activists living in Europe (Figure 5.6). The first is related to, for example, Bridgeman and the British LAI section’s prominent role in developing a campaign in Europe against the Meerut trial in India (1929–1933). The LAI also highlighted the continual



FIGURE 5.6 *The executive committee of the LAI at a meeting in Berlin on 18–19 August 1928*

Note: Top row, from left to right, Virendranath Chattophadyaya, Reginald Orlando Bridgeman, Willi Münzenberg, and Shapurji Saklatvala, for example. Seated in the middle, James Maxton.

SOURCE: *ARBEITER-ILLUSTRIERTE ZEITUNG* VII:40 (1928).

Chinese liberation struggle after the Kuomintang putsch in April 1927, initially via the short existence of the Chinese National Agency in Berlin, which at the time had been set up on Münzenberg's initiative and was co-ordinated by the LAI and the Agitprop Department of the ECCI in Moscow. This continued with attempts to circulate anti-imperialist propaganda from Europe to the colonies, while the International Secretariat merged anti-imperialism with the anti-war issue in 1932, which suggests that the LAI was the litmus test for what later resulted in the Amsterdam-Pleyel Movement (1932–33).

The unofficial and non-public side of the LAI is of a more shadowy nature, i.e. the ambitions of the LAI and its International Secretariat to function as the central hub of the anti-imperialist movement in Europe. This aspect reveals the instrumental use the Comintern made of the organisation: to act as an intermediary between the Comintern and nationalist movements in the colonies. Virendranath Chattopchadyaya, the Indian nationalist revolutionary and anti-imperial traveller held the position of LAI International Secretary (1928–31) at the International Secretariat. Chatto was responsible for introducing the idea of getting the LAI to focus on minor but more specific activities, i.e. to use the LAI as an educational centre and hub for anti-colonial activists in Europe. The primary aim of these courses was to find reliable and close contact persons who could fulfil the confidential role as LAI representatives in their home countries. News of such contacts was spread across Europe, while at the same time eagerly exposing and proclaiming their connections back to China, Japan, India, the Arab countries, West Africa and North Africa. Chatto advocated the use of curricular activity, as noted in a document addressed to Piatnitsky and the Eastern Secretariat on 5 November 1930, to “find the best and most reliable among them to take up the question of sending literature” back to India. The content in these courses was crucial, adjusted along the Marxist-Leninist conception of imperialism, where teachers such as the German scholar on Asia and Communist activist Karl August Wittfogel (who held the position as LAI Secretary in Frankfurt am Main) gave lectures on specific topics connected with the “Asian awakening”. A vital secondary function of these courses was the pre-course political screening of the candidates, i.e. to see whether they were useful, reliable, or suitable to undergo further education at one of the Comintern's educational units in Moscow (e.g. the International Lenin School, or the *Kommunisticheskii universitet trudishchikhsia Vostoka*; Communist University for Eastern Workers; KUTV).⁹¹

91 Kurse für koloniale Studenten in Berlin, author: Chatto, to Eastern Secretariat and Piatnitsky, Moscow, 5.11.1930, RGASPI 495/19/312, 38–42.

The LAI's International Secretariat co-ordinated both the organisation's transnational and international activities. This roundabout organisational system involved the following: the International Secretariat received instructions from the Eastern Secretariat on what to do; these orders were then transmitted to the specific national section/s. A major function the sections had to fulfil was to collect intelligence on political and social conditions in their home country, information that was then sent on to the International Secretariat before it was finally despatched to Comintern headquarters in Moscow. Hence, the transnational networks and connections of the LAI facilitated the creation of a covert community, based on finding intelligence, which the Comintern could then use in its formulation of future policies and strategies on the colonial question. The second aspect of this was that the accumulated material assisted the decision-makers within the Comintern in the shaping of the LAI's political agenda. As the Comintern designed both the nature and the content of the LAI's propaganda, this also involved the scrutinising and approval of activities, such as Chatto's courses on imperialism in Berlin.

The End of Euphoria and Gradual Decline

The euphoria of the Brussels Congress was over towards the end of 1927. According to historian Mustafa Haikal, who was one of the first to examine the LAI *fond* in the Comintern Archive after its opening in late 1991–1992, the organisation was heading towards its “disintegrative process” in connection with the LAI General Council held on 9–11 December 1927.⁹² The difficulties encountered in making the transition from demonstration to organisation was one reason for this, but the main explanation can be found in the Comintern's desire to secure Communist control over the LAI. What other explanations might strengthen this view? The crucial turning point was the “Second International Congress against Colonialism and Imperialism” held in Frankfurt am Main on 21–27 July 1929. This congress had, in comparison to the chaotic *ad hoc* solutions prior to convening the Brussels Congress, been meticulously planned, from beginning to end, in different commissions at Comintern headquarters in Moscow, involving the active participation of high-ranking officials (e.g. Manuïlsky, Molotov, Kuusinen and Piatnitsky). This preparatory process was decisive in turning the Frankfurt Congress into a practical display of how international Communism had made a radical “turn to the Left”, and moreover, this implies the implementation of Stalinisation and the final instalment of Stalin's leadership in the Soviet Union, and how this affected the Communist “solar system”. The “turn to the Left” hailed the entry of the explicit radical

92 Haikal, “Die Kommunistische Internationale...”, pp. 239–252.

“class against class” strategy that no longer sanctioned political collaborations with parties, organisations or associations outside the Communist movement. Hence, this political shift marked the end of the “united front” policy that had been approved at the Sixth International Comintern Congress in Moscow in 1928. The main point of moving away from the “united front” to “the new line” represented, firstly, an ideological panorama which sought to confirm the alleged inherent strength of Communism to act as an independent political entity, detached from Socialists and Social Democracy as political movements. Secondly, both the Comintern and international Communism wanted to portray themselves as being the sole bearers and genuine radical representatives of a working-class party. This consequently resulted in an increased antagonism towards elements outside the Communist movement, leaving Socialists, pacifists, or nationalists to be categorised as either “social Fascists”, “national reformists” or, even worse, as “agents of imperialism”.⁹³

The Tenth ECCI Plenum, which convened in Moscow on 3–19 July 1929, corroborated the “correctness” of “the new line” and its advocacy of the “class against class” strategy. Kuusinen’s survey of the Comintern and the “international situation” focused on clarifying the new attitude vis-à-vis Social Democracy:

The Plenum of the ECCI imposes the obligation of all the Sections of the Communist International to intensify their fight against international Social Democracy *as the social base of capitalism* [added by hand in the document, author’s remark]. *The Plenum of the ECCI proposes that special attention be paid to an energetic struggle* [added by hand in the document, author’s remark] against the “Left” wing *of Social Democracy* [added by hand] which retards the process of the disintegration of Social Democracy by sowing the illusion that it represents an opposition to the Social Democratic leadership whereas as a matter of fact it wholeheartedly supports the policy of Social Fascism.⁹⁴

This change in attitude would have a decisive impact on the Comintern’s mass and sympathising organisations, something Kuusinen later returned to on 13 July when he expounded the Comintern’s position on the “united front”:

93 The corpus of accumulated literature on the Sixth International Comintern Congress in 1928 is vast, see for example Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern. A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Houndsmills: Macmillan Press, 1996) for a general survey on the congress.

94 (English version) The International Situation and the C.I.’s next task, (Report by Kuusinen, vertraulich), July, 1929, RGASPI 495/168/14, 50–69.

The united front strategy, which we used to carry out from below, we have since then no longer pursued from below, but from above. We have through our tactic a stable position among the broad working masses, [and] in the mass movements of the proletariat.⁹⁵

“Class against class” and the renunciation of the “united front” strategy from below was disastrous for the LAI, particularly as the organisation had focused its political impetus and charisma on contacts outside the Communist movement. The Frankfurt Congress convened on 21 July and was attended by 263 delegates from 31 countries and regions, representing 99 organisations, political parties and associations. The congress turned into a literal political battlefield with the Communists standing on one side facing the non-Communist delegates on the other side. As the former criticised the Socialists and colonial nationalists of advocating reformism and pacifism instead of revolution, the latter responded with resilience and silence. The Indian delegate of the Indian National Congress Shivaprasad Gupta was brusquely attacked by the British Communist and expert on the Indian question Rajani Palme Dutt, who accused Gupta of being merely a “Gandhist follower” and an “agent of imperialism”. This continued as James W. Ford, a Communist from the USA and leader of the Negro delegation who, in his speech on “the modern history of the Negro”, accused William Pickens, delegate of the W.E.B. Du Bois organisation the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, of focusing the Negro liberation struggle on the question of race rather than on class. In fact, the primary reason for Ford being in Frankfurt was to hold preparatory conferences for what would later result in the establishment of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers’ (ITUCNW) at a conference in Hamburg on 7 July 1930 (see Figure 5.7).⁹⁶

The Frankfurt Congress in 1929 had the opposite effect on the LAI to that generated by the euphoria of the Brussels Congress in 1927. The aftermath of the Frankfurt congress resulted in both internal crisis and external chaos, with a majority of distinguished non-Communist members in the LAI Executive Committee (“prominente Persönlichkeiten”) either voluntarily leaving (Nehru, Edo Fimmen and Hatta) or being denounced. The most explicit case was the denunciation of LAI Chairman James Maxton, who was expelled by the British LAI section in September, accused of not having shown any “interest whatever in events of tremendous importance in colonial countries”. Albert Einstein,

95 X Plenum, 16. Sitzung/Nachmittags, Moscow, 13/7–1929, RGASPI 495/168/120, 1–25.

96 For the ITUCNW, see Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic* as well as Chapter 7 of this volume.

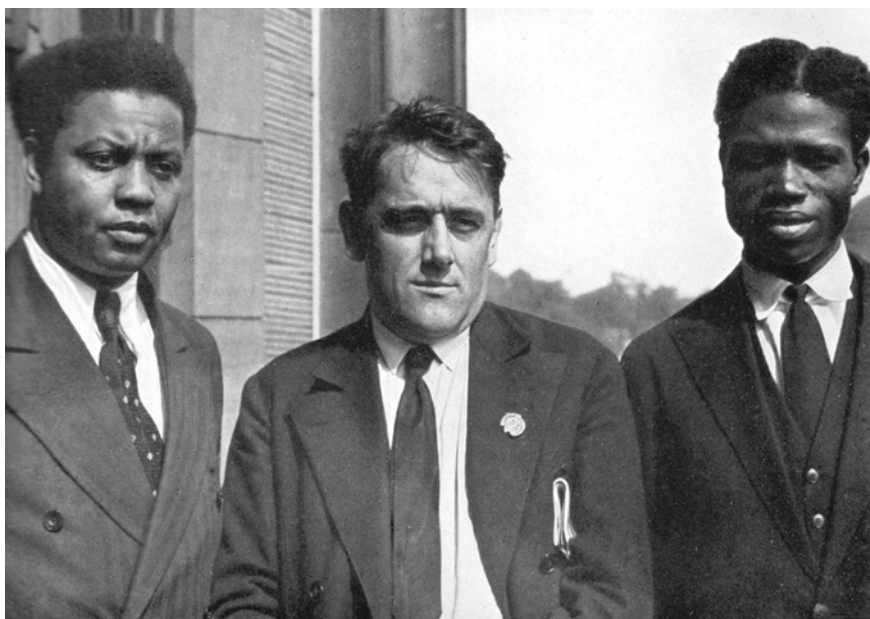


FIGURE 5.7 *Anti-imperialist visionaries and entrepreneurs at the Second International Congress Against Colonialism and Imperialism in Frankfurt am Main 20–27 July 1929*

Note: From left to right, James W. Ford (trade union activist and communist from the USA), Willi Münzenberg, and Garan Tiemoko Kouyaté (communist of Malian origin, based in Paris).

SOURCE: ADOLF EHRT, *DER WELTBOLSCHEWISMUS. EIN INTERNATIONALES GEMEINSCHAFTSWERK ÜBER DIE BOLSCHEWISTISCHE WÜHLARBEIT UND DIE UMSTURZVERSUCHE DER KOMINTERN IN ALLEN LÄNDERN* (BERLIN: ANTI-KOMINTERN, 1936).

the LAI's Honorary President, resigned after finding out that an adopted congress resolution on the Arab question included anti-Semitic references.

The dilemma facing the LAI, having to adapt itself to both the Stalinisation of the Comintern and the radical implications of "class against class", was further accentuated as the national Communist parties were either indifferent to or had no chance of assisting the organisation on a regular daily basis. In August–September 1930, the Czechoslovakian Communist Bohumil Šmeral, who had been appointed as LAI Secretary (alongside Chatto and Münzenberg) after the Frankfurt Congress for the purpose of monitoring the activities in Berlin, was in charge of leading an investigation in order to solve the LAI's internal crisis. At a meeting with the Comintern's Political Commission in Moscow on 13 September, Šmeral summarised the basic problems that the LAI had faced both prior to and after the Frankfurt Congress. According to Šmeral's final report ("Bericht des Gen. Smeral über die Lage der 'Liga gegen den Imperialismus'"), it had been unfortunate for the LAI that its inauguration

had coincided with the peak of the “second period” [the united front]. The duality and irony of Šmeral’s conclusion was further accentuated as he conceded that it was not logical and was, in fact, “wrong to apply the policy [the Third Period; class against class] of today to the former”. Thus, the LAI seemed to have been caught in the void between what Comintern described as the Second and Third Periods, something which questioned the very idea of getting the organisation to become “a progressive” political actor acting as the vanguard of anti-imperialism, Šmeral concluded.⁹⁷

The End ... and a New Beginning?

From the end of 1930 to the beginning of 1933, the LAI gradually descended towards its nadir. Firstly, the International Secretariat lost its impetus, due to increasing internal pressure (lack of funds, interchange of personnel, power struggles) as a consequence of the general crisis in 1930. Secondly, political anxiety in the Weimar Republic added an extra weight to the already stressful situation. Hence, as described above, while the activities of the LAI were focusing more and more on finding suitable individuals (“political material”) along the principle Chatto had introduced in 1930, the LAI was turning into a genuine orchestrator of propaganda, e.g. the organisation participated in campaigns by both the IAH and the International Red Aid (the Manchurian crisis, Scottsboro campaign, the Noullens affair and the anti-war question). Thirdly, the LAI’s transnational connections depended solely on utilising existing contacts where, for example, its relationship with the British LAI section remained rather functional despite a shortage of funds at the London secretariat, while the poor state of affairs in the French LAI section became evident in connection with the meagre preparations for the Counter Exhibition on Imperialism in response to the Colonial Exhibition in Paris (Bois de Vincennes) in 1931. This anti-imperialist counter exhibition exposed how the relations between the section and the PCF had completely broken down due to poor communications and indifference on behalf of the party.

For most people involved in the LAI, the causality of internal and external factors contributed to determining their fateful ends. In July 1931, Chatto received instructions from the Hungarian Communist and LAI liaison at Comintern headquarters Ludwig Magyar, to travel to Moscow and answer to the accusation of “political dishonesty”, a charge based on his activities during the First World War as one of the leaders of the pro-Indian nationalist group the “Berlin Committee” (*Zentralkomitee des indischen Nationalisten*; 1914–1919).

97 Bericht des Gen. Smeral über die Lage der “Liga gegen den Imperialismus”. Für die Sitzung der Politikkommission, Moscow, 13.9.1930, RGASPI 495/4/52, 12–42.

Deprived of his position as LAI International Secretary, Chatto had no other choice after arriving in Moscow but to remain in the Soviet Union, and in 1937, just as the Great Terror was gaining its momentum, he was executed in Moscow on 2 September 1937, accused of having been a German spy.

With Hitler and the Nazi Party's assumption of power after the Reichstag election on 30 January 1933, the end of inter-war German Communism drew closer. On the night of 27 February, its literal end became reality with the Reichstag Fire. The LAI's International Secretariat had, however, already prepared itself for this eventuality. On the same day as Hitler was appointed Reich Chancellor, its last meeting was held at the bureau of the International Secretariat where the decision was taken to first dismantle the LAI's operative and structural businesses in Germany, and secondly, to transfer its activities to Paris. The French capital was one of two options proposed, the second being London. However, according to the Bulgarian Communist and leader of the subversive and secretive Comintern auxiliary body the Western European Bureau (WEB), Georgi Dimitrov, who went under the pseudonym "Helmut", Paris offered more opportunities for the LAI to revive its activities because of the large-scale network of Communists already living in the city.⁹⁸

After the Reichstag Fire, Paris briefly turned into a haven for German Communist émigrés. Once Münzenberg had managed to escape and pass the German-French border in the beginning of March 1933, and after he had arrived in Paris in the company of his partner, Babette Gross, he experienced it as coming to "a new world".⁹⁹ In the meantime, the German Communist and IAH functionary, Allo Bayer, had succeeded in both dismantling and transferring the LAI's International Secretariat in Berlin to Paris. However, it seems as though the German police most probably confiscated the LAI documents and other material Bayer had sent in February before they had even crossed the border to France. With its move to Paris, it soon became evident that it would be difficult to resurrect the LAI as a vigorous and active international organisation. For Münzenberg, having to adapt to the political and social setting of Paris, he could only recommend that Magyar and Piatnitsky reconsider the option of transferring the LAI International Secretariat to London under Bridgeman's supervision. On 20 August 1933, Münzenberg asked Piatnitsky to be "relieved from my former work in the League and to no longer be cited as Secretary of

98 Report from "Helmut"/Dimitrov, Berlin, to L. Magyar, Moscow, 6.2.1933, RGASPI 542/1/59, 29.

99 Letter from Babette Gross and Willi Münzenberg, Paris, to Fritz Brupbacher, Zürich, 29.4.1933, IISG 4249.10/194.

the League [LAI, author's remark]".¹⁰⁰ His request was approved on 27 August and, in September, the LAI's International Secretariat had London as its new operative centre, with Bridgeman acting as International Secretary.

The organisation Bridgeman inherited was not comparable to the LAI's former glory days. It was lacking in functionality and, as Bridgeman stated in his report on LAI activities in 1934, after having assumed authority over the LAI, the only material he had received was "a list of addresses which was not up to date and so of little value", and therefore, he had been forced to "reconstitute the work of the League from the beginning".¹⁰¹ From 1933 until the formal dissolution of the LAI in 1937, Bridgeman and LAI Political co-Secretary Ben F. Bradley had focused on promoting colonial questions such as the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and the ensuing Abyssinian crisis in 1935–36, the Chinese liberation struggle and other regional issues characteristic for being "oppressed" while re-establishing former connections with other known anti-colonial sympathisers in Great Britain and Europe. The latter relates to Bridgeman's contacts with A. Fenner Brockway in 1935, hoping to get the ILP to support the LAI's Abyssinian protest campaign.¹⁰² However, the Communist connections had left a heavy ideological burden on the LAI's political credo as a serious and independent anti-imperialist organisation. Thus, on 11 May 1937, the message was sent out that in order to "broaden and strengthen the colonial work in Britain [...] the organisational weakness of the League" had to be addressed.¹⁰³

It is rare to find the definitive end of an organisation such as the LAI put into words and, as in this case, the 11 May letter can be interpreted as an attempt to write the obituary of the LAI and its legacy as an anti-imperialist organisation in its support of the colonial liberation struggle. This did not, however, mean the end of things, rather, this was the beginning of a new phase of anti-imperial activism as Bridgeman established the Colonial Information Bureau in 1937, an association that assumed the LAI's functions and activities as a global petitioner against colonialism and imperialism. The history of the LAI should, therefore, not be seen as the definitive end of a political idea and practice; instead, this narrative stretches beyond the Second World War and has a linear

100 Note from Münzenberg, Moscow, to O. Piatnitsky, Moscow, 20.8.1933, RGASPI 495/4/260, 72.

101 Report from Bridgeman, London, to Shapurji Saklatvala, London, 1934, RGASPI 542/1/61, 1–43.

102 On the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis and the "Hands off Abyssinia" campaign 1935, see further Chapter 7 of this volume.

103 Saville, "The League Against Imperialism", pp. 45–46; Circular letter from the League Against Imperialism, London, 11/5–1937, HPC (Berlin).

connection with other anti-colonial movements and the ensuing decolonisation process during the post-war period.¹⁰⁴ It is against this historical backdrop and setting the LAI's history and narrative can be (and has been) interpreted.

Questioning Nostalgia as a Historical Method

Nostalgia is both a frame of mind and a method through which to understand historical processes. Critical histories of events, episodes or pivotal moments in the history of twentieth-century resistance movements have to understand and find a way of relating to this method of interpreting history. At the same time, this calls for scepticism and a critical assessment of, first, what the sources have to say, and secondly, what kind of conclusions previous research and historiography have drawn on the object of interest, and finally, what a detailed analysis combining the two above has to offer. This article has attempted to include a number of perspectives which elucidate the history of the League Against Imperialism. The purpose has not been to validate the historiography of the LAI from a qualitative perspective, neither has the motive been to reduce the value of former interpretations. The aim has instead been to introduce and discuss how and why different approaches have painted different pictures of the LAI as an anti-imperialist organisation. Antoinette Burton has written about how, in the context of the Bandung conference, histories have engaged in a "persistent nostalgia" that has "aided an almost continual consolidation of narratives" about inter-racial solidarity, e.g. Third World histories or the decolonisation process from the 1950s to the 1970s.¹⁰⁵ It therefore seems that the nostalgia of the LAI and its anti-imperialist credo has been kept intact by either devaluing or ignoring its Communist history, i.e. that the LAI from

104 The LAI's linear and historical connections to other anti-colonial/imperialist organisations, for example the *Colonial Information Bureau, Centre against Imperialism* (1939–1948), *Congress of Peoples Against Imperialism* (1948–1954), *Movement for Colonial Freedom* (1954–1970), and *Liberation* (1970–), is part of my postdoctoral research on radical anti-colonial spaces in a changing world during the twentieth century. Part of this discussion is introduced in my article "From Versailles to Bandung: The Interwar Origins of Anti-Colonialism", in *Bandung, Global History and International Law: Critical Past and Futures*, Luis Eslava and Michael Fakhri (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

105 Antoinette Burton, "The Sodalities of Bandung: Toward a Critical 21st-century History", in Lee (ed.), *Making a World after Empire*, p. 356.

the outset was established and supported by the Comintern and had intimate ties to the international Communist movement. When Sukarno referred to the LAI and the Brussels Congress in Bandung, he most likely did not have in mind either Münzenberg's or Virendranath Chattophadyaya's pivotal roles in administering the transnational networks of the LAI.

Regardless of its rather ambitious starting point, to re-assess the history, interpretations and historiography of the LAI, the focus of this article has rather been to make a further contribution to the complex study of the sympathising organisations which the Comintern created and supported within its Communist "solar system". In order to achieve any kind of understanding of the above, it has been essential to include and discuss factors such as chronology, theoretical dimensions of space and place, particular actors (individuals and institutions) who held key roles, and the sources, and why every assessment of an organisation such as the LAI relies exclusively on what the archives and the documents can bring to light. Is it even possible to fully divulge the LAI's legacy and, if so, is this connected in any way to nostalgia? Furthermore, what did the LAI represent for those involved in it, and to whom did the LAI send out its message of resistance against colonialism and imperialism? While the sources have disclosed the primary reason for the LAI's establishment: to act as a neutral intermediary between the Comintern and the nationalist movements in the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the central challenge for any investigation into the LAI should address causality as a central theme. Why was the LAI established, and what did it amount to? As much as this chapter has attempted to answer these questions, either briefly or in detail, the nostalgia of anti-imperialism and how this is connected to the LAI's history can be traced to the people who had some level of engagement in the anti-imperialist movement between the wars. Sukarno's nostalgia of the Brussels Congress seems to have been based on the need to justify a chronological and linear connection which had united a global voice of resistance against the world order in the post-war era.

The LAI belongs to the historiographical vein which is seeking to explain and understand international Communism as a global phenomenon in the twentieth century. Yet, one can not refute its heuristic connection with the history of decolonisation. This is partly connected to the comprehensive aim of this article, which questions the academic need to forge or categorise the LAI's history as being a part either of Communist or of decolonisation history. A far more constructive approach would be (and is) to reach an understanding of the different social and political contexts and settings in which the LAI was active. For example, Boittin's study of inter-war anti-imperialism and feminism in Paris offers an insightful narrative which sheds some new light on the LAI's

endeavours and failures, as in this particular case, the French capital.¹⁰⁶ Another aspect is the post-colonial understanding of the LAI, which leaves open the question of whether it is even possible for this perspective to hold constructive “meetings” with historical writings on twentieth-century Communism. I must argue that the archival revolution in both Russia and Germany has made it possible to revise and re-assess the dynamics of the Communist “solar system” during the inter-war years, irrespective of any theoretical approaches or political agendas. The LAI was as much a success as it was a failure; there can be no doubt about this. The issue is whether it is possible (or even, logical) to find answers while assessing the LAI as either a success or a failure. The LAI was inescapably a part of interwar Communist structures (networks, policies and individual commitment), an international organisation that posed and introduced itself as a sympathising organisation expounding the beliefs and interests of the colonial liberation struggle. To some degree, the societal impact of the LAI resided partly in its raising the awareness of colonial oppression in circles outside the Communist movement, a type of organisational and political practice which we today understand in the form of non-governmental organisations, or for that matter, almost take for granted in our modern society and its social media landscape.

After 1991, the LAI’s history has undergone a thorough revision through first, archival work, and secondly, with the inclusion of new theoretical perspectives applied to the study of twentieth-century resistance movements. The critical histories by Haikal, Martin, Piazza, Weiss and others deliver a nuanced picture of the LAI’s structural and functional dynamics. This includes aspects of international Communism, anti-colonialism, and an explanation of the nostalgia of anti-imperialism and how this produced a legacy for the liberation movements during the postwar era, culminating in the anti-colonial *rendezvous* at the Afro–Asian Conference in Bandung in 1955.

This does not mean, however, that postcolonial methods and theories, e.g. the subaltern interpretation of Empire as the global determinant and opposition against this structure, are of secondary value. Far from it. Robert J.C. Young’s interpretation of the LAI, for example, offers a historical framework that places the organisation in its proper radical context, or Vijay Prashad’s understanding of the Brussels Congress as an “intra-planetary experiment” of anti-imperialist solidarity, and Christopher J. Lee’s historical linear framing of Bandung–Brussels, are all crucial contributions to the LAI’s history and the anti-imperialist movement between the wars. However, there still remain several blank spots in post-colonial perceptions of twentieth-century resistance.

106 Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*.

The discerning *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature* (2012) may serve as a suitable example of this. According to the section “Chronology”, political events are listed alongside literary and cultural events and yet, while the 1927 Brussels Congress is ignored completely, Bandung is located in its proper chronological place. It must be emphasised that the main point here is not to criticise the mistake of not having included the Brussels Congress, although a closer scrutiny of what is included in 1927 makes the omission of the Brussels Congress even more glaring. Included in its list of literary and cultural events for the same year, 1927, the book *The Cosmic Race*, authored by the Puerto Rican writer and distinguished anti-colonial activist José Vasconcelos, is mentioned.¹⁰⁷ A closer look at the historical relations between Vasconcelos and the LAI reveal the following: Vasconcelos was involved in the LAI’s efforts to draw attention to the Brussels Congress in 1926, as he had been appointed as a member of the “Provisional Committee of the International Congress against Colonial Oppression”. This committee was set up in September–November 1926 by Louis Gibarti, International Secretary of the League Against Colonial Oppression, and it included members such as Mme Sun Yat-sen (the widow of the Kuomintang leader); the Chinese Kou Meng-yu and member of the IAH; Nehru; the Egyptian nationalist leader Mohamed Hafiz Ramadan Bey; Ramon de Negri from Mexico; the German scholar Theodor Lessing; the German Alfons Goldschmidt (who lived in Mexico); Münzenberg; the French authors Henri Barbusse and Fernand Buisson; Albert Fournier; Lansbury; Maxton; the British Communist Shapurji Saklatvala; William Pickens; the pacifist and leader of the American Civil Liberties Union Roger Baldwin; and the associates of Vasconcelos in the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico Manuel Ugarte, Louis Casabona and César Falcon.¹⁰⁸ This “Provisional Committee” furthers the understanding of how Münzenberg and the IAH tried to introduce an initiative which had managed to gather disparate anti-colonial/imperialist activists from different political and cultural settings. Moreover, this illustrates the difficulties in establishing a *historie totale* of twentieth-century anti-imperialism.

In order to analyse the nostalgia of anti-imperialism and how it is interconnected with the LAI’s history, a constructive approach would be to continue

107 “Chronology”, in Ato Quayson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. xli.

108 Letter from Louis Gibarti, International Secretariat, LACO, Berlin, to Robert Minor, Chicago, 11.11.1926, RGASPI 495/18/484, 1–2; Invitation to the International Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism, Berlin, 15.12.1926, SAPMO-BA ZPA R/1001/6751, 27; Invitation to the International Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism, Berlin, 15.12.1926, IISG LAI Collection 3392.1/1.

discussing theoretical and methodological frameworks based on an understanding of what the archives can disclose (and have already disclosed). This was the fundamental *leitmotif* in my doctoral dissertation on the LAI; yet, this continues to challenge the traditional and persisting view of methodological nationalism, e.g. the histories of national Communism as opposed to the histories of international Communism as both a means and a method of writing the history of twentieth-century Communism, or the history of twentieth-century radicalism and anti-imperialism. By including perspectives such as nostalgia and historiography, another step has been taken towards challenging former methods of interpretation in relation to both the LAI and other sympathising organisations. However, a reasonable conclusion is that the LAI's history is, and should be, located within the global history of international Communism, radical labour movements and anti-colonialism/imperialism between the wars.

Previous research on the LAI should not be perceived as being scarce. However, as the LAI's historiography has shown, there still exist gaps in its historical record. The nostalgia of anti-imperialism has, in some respects, contributed to a filling-in of several of these gaps, especially by those involved in the organisation who either described or tried to present some kind of narrative of the LAI in retrospect. By locating the LAI within the history of inter-war resistance movements, this firstly enriches the understanding of various places of radicalism, as they were scattered across the world, and secondly, the LAI emerges for a brief moment as one of the most influential organisations of its kind, as it managed to both organise and stage protests against colonialism and imperialism, thus questioning the existing world order after the disillusionment of the Versailles Peace conference in 1919. Hence, these are crucial factors that shed light both on the nostalgia of anti-imperialism between the wars and on how the LAI was able to become a nostalgic point of reference for leading proponents of the colonial liberation movements during the post-war era.

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The International of Seamen and Harbour Workers – A Radical Global Labour Union of the Waterfront or a Subversive World-Wide Web?

Holger Weiss

Introduction

The International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (ISH) was a short-lived transnational radical umbrella organisation for Communist-dominated/controlled trade unions of maritime transport workers established in 1930 during the “Third Period” of the Communist International (Comintern). Officially presented as a radical and independent platform, the ISH was in reality a masked continuation of the Comintern’s Maritime Section, the International Propaganda and Action Committee of Transport Workers (IPAC Transport), and was financed through subsidies from Moscow. The ISH’s aim was to challenge the hegemony of the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) as well as the various national waterfront labour unions. The rationale behind this policy was the belief in Moscow that the former policy of a “united front from below”, where the Communists had formed so-called revolutionary opposition groups within labour unions dominated by the Social Democrats, had to be replaced by a new approach. The main idea was to transform existing opposition groups into independent radical unions and to establish independent radical platforms for these organisations.

During the inter-war period, maritime workers constituted a multi-faceted group, e.g. the seamen and stokers of many nationalities hired on the various national merchant fleets as well as the dockers and stevedores working in the harbours. Working conditions both on board and on land were tough and worsened due to the economic depression from the late 1920s onwards. Before the First World War, the organisation of maritime workers had usually been in national trade unions. Most of them targeted special branches and were mainly White, male unions – with one exception: the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW, known as the Wobblies). Established in the USA in 1905, the IWW was known for its syndicalist approach to militant unionism and rallied both socialist and anarchist trade unionists and welcomed all workers, including

women, immigrants, African Americans and Asians.¹ Its maritime branch, the Marine Transport Workers' Industrial Union (MTWIU) had a presence not only in the USA but also in ports in the Caribbean, Mexico, South America, Australia, New Zealand, Germany and the United Kingdom. Several maritime trade union activists, such as George Hardy who was one of the key figures in the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers in the early 1930s, or Niilo Välläri, the leader of the Finnish Seamen's Union, had a background as a Wobbly.²

However, as Dieter Nelles has outlined in his study on the ITF, syndicalist work for the maritime transport workers was difficult not least due to regulations about when to strike and their long period at sea when they were cut off from organised labour unions. Another handicap was that both Social Democratic and Communist party and labour leaders regarded the waterfront as a secondary field of work – in sheer numbers, the maritime workers constituted but a small portion of the work force.³ Also, as Peter Cole and David Featherstone have underlined, the multi-ethnic organisation of the Wobblies in opposition to the exclusionary and segregationist official labour movements in the USA was situated, limited and localized.⁴ Similar calls for multiracial spaces and organisations by activists in the International of Seamen and Harbour workers faced similar problems in the 1930s,⁵ as will be discussed further below.

Capitalists as well as political and labour leaders from the extreme Left to the extreme Right realised that the transport workers were of utmost

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- 1 David Featherstone, *Solidarity: Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism* (London: Zed Books, 2012), pp. 77–88.
 - 2 See further Peter Cole, *Wobblies on the Waterfront: Interracial Unionism in Progressive-Era Philadelphia* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Eric Thomas Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday: The Rise and Destruction of the Industrial Workers of the World during the World War I Era* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2014).
 - 3 Dieter Nelles, *Widerstand und internationale Solidarität. Die Internationale Transportarbeiter-Föderation (ITF) im Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Essen: Klartext-Verlag, 2001). On the ITF, see further Bob Reinalda (ed.), *The International Transport-Workers Federation 1914–1945. The Edo Fimmen Years* (Amsterdam: Stichting beheer IISG, 1997).
 - 4 See further Cole, *Wobblies on the Waterfront*, and David Featherstone, *Resistance, Space and Political Identities: The Making of Counter-Global Networks* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), pp. 124–125.
 - 5 See also David Featherstone, "Maritime Labour and Subaltern Geographies of Internationalism: Black Internationalist Seafarers' Organising in the Interwar Period", *Political Geography* 49 (2015), pp. 7–16.

importance for industry and commerce. They controlled the railways and sea-ways that connected factories with consumers as well as the transportation of armaments and war equipment. The waterfront evolved as a battleground during the 1920s and early 1930s where shipowners and national governments tried to reduce wages and cut expenses as well as to block the radicalisation of the maritime workers and the spread of revolutionary ideas. On the other hand, one fundamental guideline amongst the Bolsheviks in Moscow was their fear of an imminent attack against the Soviet Union by the “imperialists” and their lackeys. From Moscow’s perspective, therefore, the maritime transport workers were crucial allies, not only in preventing an attack on the Soviet Union but also as potential couriers for the Comintern as they criss-crossed the Seven Seas and called at ports that were outside the reach of the Soviet Russian merchant fleet.

Comintern agitation and propaganda amongst the maritime transport workers had two main objectives. The first aim was to create cells and sections among the crew on board the ships and among the harbour workers who were to serve as the core action units in case of a strike or other legal activity. The second aim was to establish a cadre of liaison personnel, usually the leaders of cells, whose task it was to maintain a secure communication infrastructure through which secret messages, publications and financial transactions as well as agents, instructors and emissaries of the Comintern apparatus could bypass the surveillance of the police and military intelligence services anywhere in the world. Starting in the 1920s, through the establishments of a series of so-called Port Bureaus and International Seamen Clubs (Interclubs) through the IPAC Transport, this system would be refined and reorganised on a global scale by the ISH and its national sections during the 1930s. Nevertheless, the basic structure of the system remained untouched despite the systemic changes in 1930. The ISH’s operations therefore rested on two pillars: the cells on board ships, and the Port Bureaus and Interclubs.⁶

While the ISH’s global history is yet to be written, the aim of this chapter is to present a tentative outline of the ISH’s national, transnational and global dimensions. As with other associated organisations of the Comintern and its syndicalist wing, the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU or Profintern), the ISH’s global ambition to emerge as an international radical platform has hitherto received little attention in research on global syndicalism and

6 For an excellent introduction to the background of the establishment of the ISH, see Lars Borgersrud, *Wollweber-organisasjonen i Norge*, Doktoravhandling i historie ved Universitetet i Oslo 1994, Chapter 1.

transnational organisations.⁷ Although the ISH even at its height during the early 1930s encompassed but a minor fraction of all waterfront labour unions, the mere existence of a radical and potentially subversive platform caused concern not only within the ITF and the national unions but also for the police and state authorities. Furthermore, as will be argued below, in contrast to the ITF the ISH was intrinsically directed towards building international solidarity not only in words but in deeds by actively highlighting an anti-colonial, anti-imperial and anti-racial agenda. Last but not least, although the ISH's strength was its global outreach, its weakness was its ambiguous structure, on the one hand being a syndicalist organisation with unclear ties to the various national Communist parties and, on the other hand, its role as an independent but in effect Moscow-controlled organisation. However, in contrast to a one-sided presentation of the ISH as being the vehicle and mouthpiece of Moscow, this chapter stresses the capacity of the organisation's agents to make independent choices. Therefore, organisations such as the ISH and its agents should be studied as responsive and pro-active subjects who tried to find room to manoeuvre during an era when space for such activities was rapidly diminishing.

The Radical Maritime Workers in Literature and Research

Hitherto, only a few studies have discussed the ISH's history and activities. Interestingly, two of its main activists, Richard Krebs and Richard Jensen, were engaged in a showdown on their experiences of working within the ISH during the 1930s. In 1941, the "autobiography" *Out of the Night* was published in the USA.⁸ This book became a bestseller and at one time was regarded as the "true story" of the ISH's clandestine and subversive operations as well as of the author's disillusionment and break with Communism. It was soon realised, however, that the author's name, Jan Valtin, was a pseudonym, his real name being Richard Krebs (1905–1951), who had been in charge of the Interclub in Bremen and Hamburg as well as having served as a so-called ISH Political Instructor

⁷ See further, e.g., Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), Jan Lucassen (ed.), *Global Labour History* (Bern etc.: Peter Lang, 2006); Marcel van der Linden, *Transnational Labour History. Explorations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) and Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World. Essays toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

⁸ Jan Valtin, *Out of the Night* (New York: Alliance Book Corporation, 1941).

in 1932 and 1933.⁹ Until the 1980s, his book was used as the main source in the descriptions of the ISH organisation and activities.¹⁰

Krebs' description of the poisonous atmosphere amongst the ISH leadership, especially the negative portrait of the leader of the German ISH section Ernst Wollweber, was challenged by the Danish Communist and ISH leader Richard Jensen (1894–1974). By contrast, in his refutations of Krebs' "revelations" in 1946, Jensen claimed that Krebs had actually been a Gestapo agent.¹¹ An intense debate also took place in France after the publication of the French translation of Krebs' book in 1948 as two high-ranking government officials, René Cance and Pierre Villon (alias Roger Walter Ginsburger), were claimed to have co-operated or even worked for the NKVD, the Soviet Secret Police, during the 1930s.¹²

The controversy between Krebs' and Jensen's presentation of the ISH's activities continued for the next decades. Richard Jensen continued to stick to his version about Krebs being a Nazi agent in the 1930s in his autobiography *En omtumlet tilværelse* (A Contested Existence).¹³ The Danish journalist Erik Nørgaard published a popular history in Danish of the ISH and its Scandinavian operations based on long conversations and interviews with Jensen, who also supplied him with material on the ISH.¹⁴

Nørgaard's publications were among the few that tried to shed some light on the history of the ISH. However, he was mainly using Danish archival material

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- 9 See further "Valtin, Jan (Krebs, Richard)", Hermann Weber/Anderas Herbst, *Deutsche Kommunisten. Biographisches Handbuch 1918 bis 1945*, Überarbeitete und stark erweiterte Auflage (Berlin: Dietz-Verlag, 2008), p. 963.
 - 10 For example, Günther Nollau, *International Communism and World Revolution: History & Methods* (New York: Praeger, 1961); Michael Rohrwasser, *Der Stalinismus und die Renegaten. Die Literatur der Exkommunisten* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1991). See also Børgersrud, Wollweber-organisasjonen i Norge, pp. 2–5, 15–16.
 - 11 Richard Jensen, *Frem i lyset. Jan Valtin Gestapo Agent Nr. 51* (København: Prior, 1946).
 - 12 C.L. Sulzberger, "French Becoming Alarmed At Red Infiltration Into High Government Positions," (Special from New York Times,) *Miami Daily News*, 22.3.1948; see further Marie-Paule Dhaille-Hervieu, *Communists au Havre: Histoire sociale, culturelle et politique (1930–1983)* (Mont-Saint-Aignan Cedex: Publications des Universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2009).
 - 13 Richard Jensen, *En omtumlet tilværelse* (København: Fremad, 1957), p. 107.
 - 14 Erik Nørgaard, *Revolutionen der udeblev. Kominterns virksomhed med Ernst Wollweber og Richard Jensen i forgrunden* (København: Fremad, 1975), updated and expanded as Erik Nørgaard, *Drømmen om verdensrevolutionen: Komintern og de revolutionære søfolk* (Lyngbe: Bogan, 1985), and Erik Nørgaard, *Truslen om krig. Komintern, Folkefront og 5. kolonne* (Lyngbe: Bogan, 1985).

and, according to Borgersrud, exaggerated the position of Copenhagen as the ISH's hub after 1933.¹⁵ Jensen himself cannot have possessed much material as he claimed in his book that he had managed to destroy all documents on his activities a few hours before the German troops reached Copenhagen in 1940.¹⁶

Still, in spite of Jensen's refutation of Krebs, *Out of the Night* was generally regarded as an important eyewitness report on the inner operations of a Comintern organisation and the amoral objectives that dominated its operations. As with other literature by former communists who had cut their ties with the Comintern, the information in Krebs' "autobiography" was seldom challenged and sets the framework for Michael Rohrwasser's narrative on Krebs in his overview of renegade literature.¹⁷

It was the "archival revolution" in the 1990s that resulted in a critical re-evaluation of Krebs' autobiography and its claim to be non-fictional. Based on German archival material, Dieter Nelles provided a critical assessment of Krebs' activities after 1933, especially his relationship with the Gestapo, and argued that Krebs had been a Gestapo agent in 1937 and 1938. In addition, he questioned the reliability and validity of Krebs' autobiography in toto and dismissed it as fiction.¹⁸ Nelles' negative account was subsequently challenged by Ernst von Waldenfels who was the first to use German, Russian, British and American archival material in his discussion of Krebs' engagement with the ISH and his activities after 1933.¹⁹ Waldenfels' attempt to neutralise Krebs' activities after he was jailed by the Gestapo in 1933 has been criticised by Dieter Nelles as being an uncritical interpretation of the German and Russian sources.²⁰ Borgersrud's doctoral thesis also supports Nelles' contention. Utilising Norwegian, Swedish, German, Dutch, Belgian and Russian archival material, Borgersrud is able to present a much more nuanced outline of the ISH's activities and of the

15 Borgersrud, *Wollweber-organisasjonen i Norge*, pp. 13–14, 77, 86–90.

16 Jensen, *En omtumlet tilværelse*, p. 168.

17 See Rohrwasser, *Der Stalinismus und die Renegaten*.

18 Dieter Nelles, "Jan Valtins >>Tagebuch der Hölle<< – Legende und Wirklichkeit eines Schlüsselromans der Totalitarismustheorie", 1999 *Zeitschrift für Sozialgeschichte des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts* 9:1 (1994), pp. 11–45.

19 Ernst von Waldenfels, *Der Spion der aus Deutschland kam. Das geheime Leben des Seemanns Richard Krebs* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2002).

20 Nelles, "Jan Valtins >>Tagebuch der Hölle<<", pp. 148–158. See also Waldenfels' refutation of Nelles' criticism, Ernst von Waldenfels, "Der Spielball. War er nichts als ein Nazi-Spion oder tatsächlich ein Bauernopfer der Komintern? Auf den Spuren des Bestsellerautors und Doppelagenten Richard Krebs alias Jan Valtin", *taz* 24.1.2004, (<http://www.taz.de/1/archiv/archiv/?dig=2004/01/24/a0263>; checked 28.12.2012).

so-called Wollweber-organisation.²¹ Recently, Guillaume Bourgeois, who also consulted American and British security sources, confirms Borgersrud's and Nelles' claim that Krebs' autobiography is heavily biased, subjective and unreliable, if not sometimes even fictitious.²²

The main problem with Krebs' account of the ISH is the author's position within the organisation. Krebs did not belong to the inner circle of the ISH and, although his book has been used as a source for reconstructing the structures and operations of the ISH, it is only of secondary value and, as will be demonstrated below, faulty. Already in his reply when interrogated by the CIC (US Army Counter Intelligence Corps) in 1950, Krebs stressed that his book had been written as an adventure story and contained several deliberate distortions and inaccuracies,²³ especially about the role of the key ISH leaders Albert Walter, Alfred Bem (a.k.a. Adolf Schelley or Shelley) and Ernst Wollweber. Waldenfels' book provides some interesting insights on the ISH but does not exclusively focus on the organisation itself. While Krebs and von Waldenfels provide a rough sketch of the ISH's structure, their main focus is on the clandestine and illegal activities of its members. What has been missing so far is an overview that takes into account both aspects of the ISH, namely its attempt to establish a global platform for organised radical maritime workers and its function as the Comintern's clandestine world-wide communication network.

A full reconstruction of the ISH's global outreach would require archival research in all of the five continents and must be the objective of a future collaborative research project. This essay is mainly based on ISH documentary sources filed in the Archives of the Communist International, Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) in Moscow, British Police and Military Intelligence files on Albert Walter, Richard Jensen and Richard Krebs of the 1920s and 1930s available at the British National Archives (BNA) in Kew, and the Interrogation Report of European Bureau of the CIC on both Krebs and the ISH filed at the National Archives in Washington DC.²⁴ The RGASPI-files constitute the core source material as they contain copies of the correspondence

21 Borgersrud, Wollweber-organisasjonen i Norge. See also Erik Nørgaard, *Krigen før krigen. Wollweber-organisationen og skibssabotagerne* (Lyng: Bogan, 1986), and Erik Nørgaard, *Krig og slutspil. Gestapo og dansk politi mod Kominterns »bombefolk«* (Lyng: Bogan, 1986).

22 Guillaume Bourgeois, "Sans patrie ni frontières de Jan Valtin: l'affaire de presse et le secret bien gardé des services spéciaux", *Le temps des médias* 16:1 (2011), pp. 19–51.

23 CIC (Army Counter Intelligence Corps) FO 10501 Report R-G44-50, page 2, RG 319 IRR, Personal File; Box 124 BB, National Archive (USA).

24 I am very grateful to Dieter Nelles for having notified me about this report.

between the ISH headquarters in Hamburg and its various sections, in addition to correspondence between the various ISH sections and Port Bureaus and Comintern headquarters in Moscow. Unfortunately, the archives of the ISH headquarters in Hamburg seem to have been lost (or have not yet been traced). They were not confiscated by the Nazis in 1933 as they had been shipped out to Copenhagen before the German police raided the ISH's premises, but what happened to the material after that is not known – apart from a reasonable guess that it was most likely not sent to Moscow.

Some material concerning ISH operations in Hamburg, especially referring to the ISH World Congress held in Altona in May 1932, is filed in the Landesarchiv in Schleswig and has been consulted. Additional documentary sources are believed to be traceable in all countries where the ISH tried to establish sections or in the archives of other organisations, such as the ITF in Amsterdam, with whom the ISH tried to establish connections in the 1930s. Although I have not been able to check these archives, a few thorough studies have already been carried out into union activities of harbour and maritime workers and their engagement in the fight against Nazism and Nazi Germany, such as Ludwig Eiber's study on workers' movements on the waterfront in Hamburg during the 1930s,²⁵ Dieter Nelles' book on the activities of the ITF against Nazism,²⁶ and Hermann Knüfken's autobiography (including his correspondence with ITF General Secretary Edo Fimmen during the 1930s).²⁷ Knüfken's autobiography and letters are particularly valuable as he belonged to the ISH leadership and was amongst those who organised the transfer of the ISH Secretariat from Hamburg to Copenhagen in 1933, and was later in charge of operations in Rotterdam. In 1936, both he and his cell broke with the Communists and joined the ITF.²⁸

There are a few studies outlining the national, regional and even meta/trans-regional aspects of the International of Harbour and Seamen. In addition to Eiber's and Nelles' works on the ISH's activities in Germany and the activities of the German exile sections after 1933, the activities of George Hardy, the leader of the Seamen Minority Movement in the United Kingdom, and his

25 Ludwig Eiber, *Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Hansestadt Hamburg in den Jahren 1929 bis 1939. Werftarbeiter, Hafenarbeiter und Seeleute: Konformität, Opposition, Widerstand* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000).

26 Nelles, *Widerstand und internationale Solidarität*.

27 Hermann Knüfken, *Von Kiel bis Leningrad. Erinnerungen eines revolutionären Matrosen von 1917 bis 1930* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 2008).

28 On Knüfken's rift with the ISH and his groups' subsequent integration into the ITF, see further Eiber, *Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung*, pp. 672–674 and Knüfken *Von Kiel bis Leningrad*.

futile attempt to establish a red seafarer's union in the United Kingdom has been critically assessed by John Manley and Kevin Morgan.²⁹ A critical presentation of George Mink's activities as organiser of the IPAC Transport in the USA and his activities as head of the Marine Workers' Industrial Union (MWIU), the ISH Section in the USA, has been provided by Vernon L. Pedersen.³⁰ In addition, there is Bruce Nelson's "history from below" of the Red waterfront in the USA and of the 1934 longshoremen strike in San Francisco and the role of the MWIU.³¹ At least two studies in France focus on the operations of the L'Internationale des marins et des dockers (IMD), as the ISH was known in French. Marie-Paule Dhaille-Hervieu's monograph provides a general overview of communist activities, including those of the IMD, in Le Havre from a local, national and international perspective as well as a sub-chapter providing local comments on Jan Valtins' critical remarks concerning the French communist (and ISH Instructor) Pierre Villon.³² The other available study is Constance Margain's PhD thesis on the IMD and ISH. Her ambition is to provide the first full analysis of the organisation's objectives and activities as well as to include a biography of some 500 activists.³³

Black internationalism, the attempts by Black seamen and dockworkers to overcome the radicalised division of the waterfront in the Black Atlantic and

29 J. Manley, "Moscow Rules? 'Red' Unionism and 'Class Against Class' in Britain, Canada and the United States, 1928–1935", *Labour/Le Travail* 56, (Fall 2005), pp. 9–49; Kevin Morgan, "The Trouble with Revisionism: or Communist History with the History Left In", *Labour/Le Travail* 63, (Spring 2009), pp. 13–155.

30 Vernon L. Pedersen, "George Mink, the Marine Workers' Industrial Union, and the Comintern in America", *Labor History* 41:3 (2000), pp. 307–320.

31 Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press 1988).

32 Dhaille-Hervieu, *Communists au Havre*.

33 Constance Margain, *L'Internationale des gens de la mer et la résistance communisme au nazisme dans la marine marchande: 1930–1937*, thèse en préparation à Le Havre, abstract available at <http://www.theses.fr/s49997> (checked 28.1.2015); Constance Margain, "Zwischen Verlusten und Trümmern: Der Widerstand der internationale der Seeleute und Hafenarbeiter gegen den Nationalsozialismus", *WORK IN PROGRESS. WORK ON PROGRESS Doktorand_Innen-Jahrbuch 2012 der Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung* (2012), pp. 99–109; Constance Margain, "La method prosopographique appliquée aux militants du syndicat de l'Internationale des gens de la Mer (1930–1937): des résultats croisés entre vécu et événements historiques", *Interrogations? Revue pluridisciplinaire de sciences humaines et sociales* 17. L'approche biographique (Janvier 2014), <http://www.revue-interrogations.org/La-methode-prosopographique> (checked 28.1.2014); Constance Margain, "The International Union of Seamen and Harbour Workers (ISH) 1930–1937: interclubs and transnational aspects", *Twentieth Century Communism* 8 (February 2015), pp. 133–144.

their problematic relationship with the ISH and its sections in the United Kingdom and France is critically discussed by Marika Sherwood, Diane Frost, Hakim Adi, David Featherstone and Christian Høgsbjerg, among others.³⁴ Especially problematic proved the relationship between the ISH and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, the radical platform established by the RILU in 1930 to mobilise Black toilers and seamen in the African Atlantic.³⁵ Similar constraints were felt by Asian seamen in the UK; they, too, had difficult relationship with the SMM.³⁶ Josephine Fowler's detailed assessment of the trans-Pacific activities of both the ISH and its forerunner is singular in its transnational and global approach.³⁷

The activities of the ISH in Copenhagen after 1933 and its links to the International Communications Office of the Comintern (OMS) are critically discussed by Niels Erik Rosenfelt.³⁸ Finally, there are a few studies on the

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- 34 Diane Frost, "Racism, Work and Unemployment: West African Seamen in Liverpool 1880s–1960s", in Diane Frost (ed.), *Ethnic Labour and British Imperial Trade: A History of Ethnic Seafarers in the UK* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), pp. 22–33; Marika Sherwood, "The Comintern, The CPGB, Colonies and Black Britons, 1920–1938", *Science & Society* 60:2 (Summer 1996), pp. 137–163; Hakim Adi, "The Comintern and Black Workers in Britain and France 1919–37", *Immigrants & Minorities* 28:2/3 (July/November 2010), pp. 224–245; Christian Høgsbjerg, "Mariner, Renegade and Castaway: Chris Braithwaite, Seamen's Organiser and Pan-Africanist", *Race & Class* 53:2 (2011), pp. 36–57; Christian Høgsbjerg, *Mariner, Renegade & Castaway: Chris Braithwaite: Seamen's Organiser, Socialist and Militant Pan-Africanist* (London: Socialist History Society & Redwoods, 2014); David Featherstone, "Harry o'Connell, Maritime Labour and the Racialised Politics of Place", *Race & Class* 57:3 (2016), pp. 71–87. Black internationalism and the formation of Black radicalised spaces and networks is also discussed in Featherstone, *Solidarity*, especially Chapters 3 and 4.
- 35 See further Holger Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic: African American Agency, West African Intellectuals and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), as well as Chapter 7 in this volume.
- 36 Marika Sherwood, "Lascar Struggles Against Discrimination in Britain 1923–45: The Work of N.J. Upadhyaya and Surat Alley", *The Mariner's Mirror* 90:4 (November 2004), pp. 438–455.
- 37 Josephine Fowler, "From East to West and West to East : Ties of Solidarity in the Pan-Pacific Revolutionary Trade Union Movement, 1923–1934", *International Labor and Working-Class History* 66 (Fall 2004), pp. 99–117; Josephine Fowler, *Japanese & Chinese Immigrant Activists. Organizing in American & International Communist Movements, 1919–1933* (New Brunswick, NJ & London: Rutgers University Press, 2007).
- 38 Niels Erik Rosenfeldt, *Verdensrevolutionens generalstad. Komintern og det hemmelige apparat* (Copenhagen: Gads forlag, 2011); Niels Erik Rosenfeldt, "Komintern og det hemmelige apparat", in Jesper Jørgensen, Alexander Chubaryan, Andrei Sorokin & Thomas Wegener Friis (red.), *Komintern og de dansk-sovjetiske relationer* (Copenhagen: Arbejdermuseet og ABA, 2012), pp. 81–128.

so-called Wollweber League (or Wollweber group) and their acts of sabotage against German, Italian and Japanese ships in 1936–1939. Although this group had no direct links to the ISH, there were several indirect ones.³⁹

Forerunners: The IPAC Transport and the Port Bureaus

The early 1920s was a turbulent period marked by various attempts by the Comintern to promote the export of a world revolution. All of them failed miserably. One lasting effect was an increasing division within the working class movement and resulted in the disastrous rift between the Communists and the Social Democrats, reformed Socialists and other groups, who rejected the idea of a violent class struggle. The Bolshevik state, the Comintern and its affiliated Communist parties as well as the Red International Labour Union (RILU), the trade union section of the Comintern established in 1921, were branded by national governments in Europe and North America as subversive movements which had to be closely monitored if not declared enemies of the state and of the existing political and economic order.⁴⁰

The Communists' dilemma was their pariah status throughout Europe. The various national Communist parties had few members apart from the German Communist Party, the KPD. Even less impressive was the Communists' position and influence within the various national and international labour unions and federations. Apart from the Czechoslovakian Labour Federation, which had affiliated with the RILU, most of the national horizontal trade

39 See further Hans Dankkaart and Rudi van Doorslaer, "De activiteiten van een communistische sabotagegroep in Antwerpen en Rotterdam: De organisatie Wollweber (1933–1939)", *VMT Cahier 1, Frans Maseereelfonds vzw* (1979), available at: <http://www.marxists.org/nederlands/thema/wereldoorlog2/1979sabotage.htm> (checked 1.2.2013); Borgersrud, Wollweber-organisasjoner i Norge; Lars Borgersrud, *Die Wollweber-Organisation und Norwegen* (Berlin: Dietz, 2001); Etienne Verhoyen, "'De zaak Block en Celis'. De moeizame relatie van de Antwerpse gerechtelijke politie met de Gestapo (1938–1941) – Deel 1", in Marc Cools et alii, *Cahiers Inlichtingenstudies/Cahiers d'Études du Renseignement 2* (Antwerpen: Apeldoorn 2012), pp. 15–72; Holger Weiss, "Tallinn–Stockholm–Hamburg–Copenhagen–Oslo: The Northern Dimension of the Global Network and Underground Activities of the Comintern, 1920–1940", in Silke Neunsinger, Mary Hilson and Iben Vyff (eds.), *Labour, Unions and Politics under the North Star: The Nordic Countries 1600–2000* (eds. Silke Neunsinger, Mary Hilson and Iben Vyff (New York: Berghahn books, forthcoming 2017).

40 On the RILU/Profintern, see further Rainer Tosstorff, *Profintern. Die Rote Gewerkschaftsinternationale 1920–1937* (Paderborn: Schoenigh, 2004).

union centres such as the British TUC, the German ADGB and the French CGT were dominated or controlled either by Social Democrats or by Reformists. The International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), or Amsterdam International, rejected all invitations by the RILU to discuss a merger or a “united front” policy, branding the Communists and their organisations as pursuing a covert policy to destabilise society and to capture labour unions from within.⁴¹

The establishment of the RILU had been an attempt by the Comintern to build a radical horizontal counterpart to the IFTU. Another plan was to influence the International Trade Secretariats (ITS), i.e. the “vertical federations” based on a single craft or industry, by establishing special organisations, the so-called International Propaganda Committees (IPC). Although the ITS and the IFTU were formally separate bodies, in practice they were linked, as members of the ITS were usually also members of their national trade union federations. The RILU’s strategy was, therefore, to influence key craft and trade unions. Several such branch committees were launched in the early 1920s, including the IPC of Transport Workers (IPC Transport) in 1922, which was renamed in 1928 as the International Propaganda and Action Committee of Transport Workers (IPAC Transport).⁴²

A key figure at IPC Transport was Albert Walter (1885–1980), an ex-seaman who was one of the leaders of the German maritime union, the Deutscher Schiffahrtsbund, which had joined the RILU in 1922.⁴³ Walter was thereafter commissioned by RILU President Alexander Losovsky to develop the IPC Transport into a global platform.⁴⁴ This was achieved through Walter’s second unit, the so-called International Port Bureaus. In 1924, he bought a house at 8, Rothesoodstrasse, close to Hamburg’s waterfront, which became the headquarters of the Hamburg Port Bureau. From here, he developed his global communication network.⁴⁵

Officially, Port Bureau activities were camouflaged under the cover of visiting locales for harbour workers and visiting seamen, the Interclub. The first Interclub had been organised in Leningrad in 1922 by another German communist, Herrmann Knüfken (1893–1976); it was to serve as the model for the one established by Walter at 8, Rothesoodstrasse in Hamburg. Another

41 Reiner Tosstorff, “Moscow’ or ‘Amsterdam’? The Red International of Labour Unions, 1920/21–1937”, *Communist History Network Newsletter Online* 8, July 2000, <http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/chnn/CHNN08AOM.html> (checked 28.12.2012).

42 Tosstorff, “Moscow’ or ‘Amsterdam’?”; Tosstorff, *Profintern*, pp. 370–374, 659.

43 “Walter, Albert Paul”, in Weber/ Herbst, *Deutsche Kommunisten*, p. 988.

44 Knüfken, *Von Kiel bis Leningrad*, pp. 210–211.

45 Valtin, *Out of the Night*, pp. 38–39, 103–104.

key club was established in Vladivostok in 1923, serving as the nodal point for activities in the Pacific.⁴⁶ Each club was to contain a library with communist and radical newspapers and journals on display as well as a restaurant or bar where cheap food was served. During the evening, the Interclub staged theatre or film shows or organised other cultural events.⁴⁷ More important was its function as a rallying point for radical seamen and communist agitators. According to a report sent to the Swedish Secret Service, the Port Bureaus and Interclubs had three main tasks: to agitate among seamen, to serve as gateways for illegal communist literature, and to provide a safe place for the meetings of the international propaganda committees. According to this report, by 1927 Interclubs were known to exist outside the Soviet Union at least in Hamburg, Duisburg, Bordeaux, Marseilles, Copenhagen, Rotterdam and New York.⁴⁸

Walter was successful in the establishment of a global communication network. His strategy had been to establish small cells onboard ships that could take care of the illegal transportation of printed agitation and propaganda material (see Figure 6.1), the illegal transfer of cash subsidies to parties and unions as well as the hiding of stowaways, including couriers and emissaries. This was achieved by the so-called Hamburg method. The core idea was to establish a personal contact between an agitator and a seaman when a new ship arrived in Hamburg. A small group of functionaries and harbour activists boarded a ship in order to distribute leaflets and pamphlets among the crew. After contacts had been established, a close interaction between the Interclub headquarters and the crew was then expected to win over at least some of the crew to the cause of radical agitation. Richard Krebs, who participated in these activities already during the 1920s, recalled that:

our immediate aim was to arouse discontent among the seamen, discontent against rations, wages and ship's discipline. Wherever a crew was receptive to our agitation, we went on to form an action committee on the ship to prepare them for coming strikes, or to build up the Party unit among the men, or to pick particularly able individuals for courier service and other confidential work.⁴⁹

46 Fowler, *Japanese & Chinese Immigrant Activists*, p. 105.

47 Knüfken, *Von Kiel bis Leningrad*, pp. 211–212.

48 Internationella hamnbyråer, 1.11.1928. This report is a translation, the original report is not indicated but was presumably written by the German police in 1927. UD:s arkiv 1920 års dossiersystem, HP 1459 32D, Den bolsjevikiska rörelsen: Sverige och utlandet, 1927–1928, Swedish National Archives, Stockholm.

49 Valtin, *Out of the Night*, p. 39.



FIGURE 6.1 Cover of *Majakas*, the journal of the illegal Estonian section of the ISH
SOURCE: *MAJAKAS* 29 (1935).

Most importantly, a report was written after every visit, listing reliable contacts and identifying potential partners for future co-operation. The names of individuals, cells and ships were thereafter collected in a catalogue. This database, which already by the late 1920s included hundreds of people and ships, was

the core of Albert Walter's communication network.⁵⁰ However, as Peter Huber and Niels Erik Rosenfeldt have emphasised, the core unit directing the Comintern's clandestine communication networks was its International Communications Office (OMS), including the operations of the courier service and the transfer of money to parties.⁵¹ Consequently, Walter's ships units were but cogs in a larger apparatus over which he and his bureau in Hamburg had no influence. Instead, as Josephine Fowler claims, the nodal point was the OMS office in Berlin headed by "Uncle Max" or Solomon Vladimirovich Mikhelson-Manuilov alias Max Ziese. Ziese, who was also in charge of the RILU European Bureau in Berlin, handled transactions between Moscow and the Party functionaries and other Comintern agents and organisers working overseas from 1929 to 1932.⁵²

The Establishment of the ISH

The "united front from below" strategy of the Comintern and the RILU came to an end in 1928. Starting with the Fourth World Congress of the RILU in July 1928, the Comintern shifted to the "class against class" strategy which was officially proclaimed at the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern in August 1928. This change in strategy signalled the break with the Communists' previous attempts to co-operate with reformist elements within the trade unions. This new strategy focused instead on the establishment of revolutionary trade unions and would take an extremely hostile stand towards reformist unions and the Social Democratic parties, branding them as "social fascists".⁵³ The Comintern's reading of the current situation was that the class struggle was reaching a new phase and a new wave of revolutionary activity was expected. RILU General Secretary Alexander Lozovsky called for a rapid formation of red unions and to break with mainstream unions that were blocking the worker's path to revolutionary consciousness.⁵⁴ Directives were sent to all Communist parties to form new unions. In Germany, this resulted in the foundation of

50 Eiber, *Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung*, p. 186.

51 Peter Huber, "The Cadre Department, the OMS and the 'Dimitrov' and 'Manuil'sky' Secretariats during the Phase of Terror", in Mikhail Narinsky and Jürgen Rojahn (eds.), *Centre and Periphery: The History of the Comintern in Light of New Documents* (Amsterdam: International Institute of Social History, 1996), pp. 129; Niels Erik Rosenfeldt, *The "Special" World. Stalin's Power Apparatus and the Soviet System's Secret Structures of Communication, I–II* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2009).

52 Fowler, *Japanese & Chinese Immigrant Activists*, p. 88; Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 324–327.

53 Tosstorff, *Profintern*, pp. 657–661.

54 Manley, "Moscow Rules?" p. 23.

the Revolutionary Trade Union Opposition (Revolutionäre Gewerkschaftsopposition, RGO).⁵⁵ In the USA, the CPUSA created several revolutionary craft unions as well as establishing the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL) as a red union centre; in Canada, the Workers' Unity League (WUL) was established in December 1929 while the National Minority Movement (NMM) was revived in the United Kingdom.⁵⁶

Moscow's idea was not only to reorganise trade union work. According to Richard Krebs, a small group of leading Communist trade union leaders, including Lozovsky, Walter and the leader of the Soviet Transport Workers' Union Kommissarenko, held a closed meeting in Moscow in January 1930 to discuss the need to also change the strategy for work on the waterfront and among seamen. The outcome of this meeting was the decision to launch yet another RILU platform, namely an International for marine and harbour workers that was to serve as the unifying body of all revolutionary unions of seamen and dockworkers.⁵⁷ As with other auxiliary units that had been established or were about to be established by the RILU, such as the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat in Shanghai (1927), the Latin American Federation in Montevideo (1929) or the International Trade Union Committee for Negro Workers (projected to be launched in 1930), the planned organisation was to be camouflaged as a sovereign and self-governing unit by placing its headquarters in Hamburg.⁵⁸

Although Krebs did not participate in this meeting, his information is valid. On 20th January, 1930, the plan to transform and reorganise the IPAC Transport into a "Berufsinternationale", i.e. an International for seamen and harbour workers, was announced in a letter. A conference was to be convened later in the year and to be preceded by an international call to revolutionary marine workers unions.⁵⁹

55 Eric D. Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890–1990: From popular protest to socialist state* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 152–153.

56 Manley, "Moscow Rules?", pp. 18–22.

57 Valtin, *Out of the Night*, p. 205; Nørgaard, *Revolutionen der udeblev*, p. 75.

58 Valtin, *Out of the Night*, p. 306. On the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat, see Vernon L. Pedersen, "Underfunded, Understaffed and Underground: The History of the San Francisco Bureau of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat", *Continuity: A Journal of History* 26 (Spring 2003); Fowler, "From East to West and West to East", and David McKnight, *Espionage and the Roots of the Cold War: The Conspirational Heritage* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2002); on the Latin American Federation, see Manuel Caballero, *Latin America and the Comintern, 1919–1943* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); on the International Trade Union Committee for Negro Workers, see Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*.

59 (Copy) Letter from NN to "Lieber Freund", 20.1.1930, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (Russian State Archive for Social and Political History,

Albert Walter and the Port Bureau in Hamburg were responsible for the organisation of the conference that was planned to be held in Hamburg in early August 1930. By July 1930, Walter informed Moscow that the international call for attendees to the conference was in progress.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, he and his associates had also been in charge of arrangements for the First World Congress of Negro Workers.⁶¹ However, in August it was realised that the Maritime Workers Conference had to be postponed until October; instead, Walter organised on the 9th and 10th August a rally of seamen and dockworkers in Hamburg. On the first day, about 2,800 seamen and dockworkers walked through Hamburg in a protest march and about 10,000 of them participated in a later mass rally. On the following day, some 1,600 participants attended a meeting that ended with the call for the foundation of a “Kampfinternationale aller Seetransportarbeiter”, i.e. an International of Maritime Workers.⁶²

The “International Conference of Seamen and Harbour Workers” finally convened on the 3rd of October 1930. 38 delegates from 26 countries met in the premises of the Port Bureau on 8, Rothesoodstrasse to discuss the future of maritime work and the need to cut ties with the reformist-controlled International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF).⁶³ According to an internal report, most of the participants came from European and American countries, such as Italy, France, Greece, Norway, Sweden, England, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, although there were also representatives from China, “Arabia”, Peru, Paraguay, Uruguay and the USA. A Presidium, chaired by Albert Walter,⁶⁴ and an Executive Committee were elected; in the latter George Hardy was nominated as Chair, and Albert Walter and Auguste Dumay as First and Second Secretary respectively.⁶⁵

Moscow; RGASPI) 534/5/216, 3. It is unclear if Albert Walter was the recipient or the author of the letter although the content could possibly indicate the latter.

60 Internationales Hafenbüro für Seeleute, Monatsbericht für Mai 1930 (Port Bureau Hamburg, Monthly Report May, hereafter IHBS MR), RGASPI 534/5/216, 25–26.

61 IHBS MR July 1930, RGASPI 534/5/216, 64. On the Negro Workers’ Conference and Albert Walter’s part in its preparation and the establishment of the ITUCNW, see further Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, Chapter 5, as well as Chapter 7 in this volume.

62 IHBS MR August 1930, RGASPI 534/5/216, 67–69.

63 Handwritten report about the meeting of 3rd October 1930 (in German), RGASPI 534/5/219, 21.

64 Members of the ISH Presidium were comrades Walter (Germany), Tompson (UK), and Toussaint (USA), while comrades Hardy (UK), Mink (USA), Dumay (France) and Centurion (“Latin America”) were listed as secretaries, see handwritten report, RGASPI 534/5/219, 21.

65 Bericht über die internationale Konferenz der Seeleute und Hafenarbeiter am 3. Oktober 1930 in Hamburg, RGASPI 534/5/219, 2–5.

Officially, this meeting resulted in the establishment of the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (ISH; Internationale der Seefahrer und Hafenarbeiter or L'Internationale des marins et des dockers). As is typical for Communist rhetoric, the list of participants in the official publication following the conference included "fictitious" attendees from Finland, Poland, Canada, "Algiers" (perhaps this was the representative from "Arabia"?), India, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Argentine, Chile and Brazil. On the other hand, the idea of the pamphlet was propagandistic: its objective was to tell its presumable reader that a new global organisation had been established which aimed to rally seamen and dockworkers under its national sections – existing or planned – in all of the aforementioned countries. Most importantly, however, was the declaration of open hostility towards the ITF: "The ITF in Amsterdam does not support the cause of the working class but that of the capitalists and the war against the Soviet Union!"⁶⁶ This proclamation used the "class against class" rhetoric, depicting the ITF as the traitor of the working class as well as being a lackey of the shipowners and of the aggressors towards the Soviet Union.

The newly established platform was for several months an unwritten chapter for both its target groups and the secret police. According to a lengthy report by a police informant at an international meeting of harbour workers and seamen held in Altona from the 10th to the 11th January 1931, the meeting on the first day had resulted in the establishment of the ISH.⁶⁷ A critical evaluation of the situation soon corrected this assumption: the ISH had in fact already been established in October 1930.⁶⁸ The January 1931 meeting instead concerned the establishment of a German section of the ISH.⁶⁹ On the other hand, the local police authorities did not change their position: no international activities had been reported before January 1931, and thus they claimed that the ISH became effective only after this January meeting.⁷⁰

What was the ISH – a revolutionary trade union platform as it proclaimed itself to be, or yet another subversive Bolshevik organisation? Richard Krebs

66 "Die ITF in Amsterdam dient nicht der Sache der Arbeiterklasse, sondern der Kapitalisten und den Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion!" Appeal in German: Seeleute und Hafenarbeiter! Proletarier aus den Häfen und von den Schiffen!, RGASPI 534/5/219, 12–16.

67 Report "Internationale Konferenz der R.G.O." by C.3 and C.4 to Abteilung IA, dated Altona 12.1.1931, Landesarchiv Schleswig (LAS) Abt. 301 Nr. 4532.

68 Letter from "Preussische Minister des Inneren an den Oberpräsidenten in Kiel", dated Berlin 5.3.1931, LAS Abt. 301 Nr. 4532.

69 Report on the "Reichskonferenz der Hafen- und Wasserarbeiter", Berlin 5.3.1931, LAS Abt. 301 Nr. 4532.

70 Report by the Preuss. Polizei-Präsident Altona-Wandsbek in Altona, 15.4.1931, LAS Abt. 301 Nr. 4532.

claimed that the ISH's operations comprised three distinctive fields: (1) revolutionary action, (2) communications between the Moscow-Berlin centres and the rest of the world, (3) maritime espionage.⁷¹ Similarly, Erik Nørgaard argues that the main objective for launching the ISH in the Comintern's strategic planning had been to unify the two already existing maritime units – the IPAC Transport and the Port Bureaus – in order to better channel and organise the clandestine and preventive operations aimed at averting war preparations against the Soviet Union, in close co-operation with the newly-established Western European Bureau (WEB) in Berlin.⁷²

However, what Krebs and other people have either downplayed or actively neglected was the outspoken will of the RILU to first and foremost establish a revolutionary trade union platform and global alternative to the ITF.⁷³ The subversive and clandestine part certainly existed, and will be discussed further below, but it was rather the aggressive and uncompromising labour union tactics that caused concern not only among shipowners and national governments but also the national reformist unions. However, Albert Walter was fully aware of the challenges involved in organising a world-wide network of ISH sections. In countries where the Communists could operate more or less freely, such as Germany and the Scandinavian countries, ISH sections were rather easily established. In other countries, especially in those where Communist activities were illegal, one would have to combine legal and illegal methods in order to organise the waterfront workers. It was also to be expected that the national governments would do their utmost to prevent the formation of a revolutionary trade union of seamen workers. Whatever the case, Walter assured Moscow that his communication system provided alternative contact avenues which enabled him to keep in touch with all ISH sections worldwide.⁷⁴

The Structure and Organisation of the ISH Secretariat (1930–1933)

The headquarters of the new organisation was located in Hamburg. A series of resolutions and instructions outlining its basic principles, operations and structures were issued in Moscow and Hamburg during the following months.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Valtin, *Out of the Night*, p. 307.

⁷² Nørgaard, *Revolutionen der udeblev*, pp. 63–64.

⁷³ Borgersrud, Wollweber-organisasjonen i Norge; Tosstorff, *Profintern*, p. 374.

⁷⁴ ISH Bericht für den Monat November 1930 (ISH Monthly Report, hereafter: ISH MR), RGASPI 534/5/219, 45–47.

⁷⁵ Resolution on Work of the Seamen's and Dockers' International, 17.II.1931, RGASPI 534/5/220, 75–76; Duties and Tasks of Secretariat Members, no date, filed 17.III.1931, RGASPI 534/5/220, 128–129.

The leading unit was the Executive Committee which constituted of the leading functionaries and secretaries in Hamburg as well as the leaders of the various national ISH sections.⁷⁶ The centres of mass agitation were the International Seamen's Clubs and their number was to be vastly expanded (see chapter below).⁷⁷

The Secretariat at the headquarters in Hamburg was the ISH's core body and initially consisted of three members. George Hardy, chair, was in charge of the *ISH Information Bulletin* as well as the contacts with the Anglophone countries, India and the Far East. Albert Walter, secretary, was in charge of the technical apparatus as well as work in Scandinavia, the Baltic Sea countries and the German-speaking countries. The third member, Auguste Dumay was in charge of connections with France, Yugoslavia, Greece, the Latin countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal) as well as work in French colonies in Africa and mandated territories the Near East and in Latin America.⁷⁸

A reorganisation of work at the headquarters in Hamburg followed sometime during the first half of 1931. The result was the establishment of a parallel unit and the arrival of a new mastermind at the ISH Secretariat: Comrade Adolf.⁷⁹ The person was Alfred Bem alias Adolf Schelley (Adolph Shelley), Moscow's representative, and identified by Krebs as an ISH Instructor. He was in charge of the so-called Illegal Secretariat, i.e., the monitoring unit of the ISH (Legal) Secretariat of Albert Walter, located in a secret office in another part of the town.⁸⁰ At this point, the ISH (Legal) Secretariat included Albert Walter, Luigi Polano (alias Henry Maurice), George Hardy and Robert Thompson, with Adolf Schelley as its new member while Auguste Dumay (Comrade Ts) was sent back to organise work in France.⁸¹ Following Hardy's criticism of work in Hamburg, the ISH Executive Committee decided at its meeting in September 1931 to transfer Hardy and Thompson to the United Kingdom. In their place, Adolf Deter alias André Rudolf, was transferred to the (Legal) Secretariat.

In accordance with the hierarchical rules of the Comintern apparatus, the various national units and its activities were to be co-ordinated, monitored and controlled by the centre. This was to be achieved by sending written instructions by couriers, by receiving written monthly reports on activities, and

76 CIC FO 10501 Report R-G44-50, page 5.

77 Draft Decisions: Basic principles [for work of the ISH], RGASPI 534/5/219, 81–84.

78 Duties and Tasks of Secretariat Members, filed 17.3.1931, RGASPI 534/5/220, 128–129.

79 See further the correspondence between George Hardy and Comrade Adolf, RGASPI 534/5/221, 162–174.

80 CIC FO 10501 Report R-G44-50, p. 2; Jensen, *En omtumlet tilværelse*, p. 103; Nørgaard, *Revolutionen der udeblev*; Nørgaard, *Drømmen om verdensrevolutionen*.

81 Arbeitsbericht des Sekretariats der I.S.H., Hamburg 16.6.1931, RGASPI 534/5/221, 178.

by visits of national functionaries to the ISH headquarters. "Travelling instructors" were sent to the national sections when they were to be reorganised, or in order to co-ordinate actions during a national strike. For example, Comrade Henry (Luigi Polano) was sent on a mission to Norway and Sweden in May 1931 with a mandate to co-manage the strike of the dockworkers in Oslo.⁸² By October 1931, the ISH engaged at least one instructor to oversee its affairs in France,⁸³ and planned to employ an additional five instructors, one for the Scandinavian and Baltic countries, Belgium and the Netherlands, a second one for the Danube countries and Greece, a third one for the Far East, a fourth one for West Africa and a fifth one for Latin America.⁸⁴ In 1932, the plan was to deploy Comrade Henry either to Spain or to the USA.⁸⁵ However, the West African mission, at least, was never realised.⁸⁶ Richard Krebs operated as ISH Instructor in Britain in 1932, and in Scandinavia in early 1933.⁸⁷

In addition, the Secretariat in Hamburg produced a monthly mimeographed periodical, *The ISH Information Bulletin*, which was sent to the functionaries in the national sections.⁸⁸ This publication was not for open circulation. Instead, the various national sections would publish their own periodicals and journals, such as *Der Sturm* in Germany, *Le Cri du Marin* in France, *The International Seafarer* in the UK, *Rød kurs*, *Laternen* and *Udkiggen* in Denmark (see Figures 6.2. and 6.3), *Hamn- och sjöproletären* in Sweden or *The Marine Workers' Voice*, *The Lookout* and *The Waterfront Worker* in the USA. Similar periodicals, such as the Finnish magazine *Majakka*, the Estonian *Majakas* or those in Chinese and Japanese, were produced and published in Hamburg and spread via ISH contact persons or the Interclubs.

The operations at the ISH headquarters and at some of the national sections were financed through funds from Moscow. According to Richard Krebs, the total budget of the organisation amounted to USD 52,000 of which USD 8,000 were used to pay for the cost of running the ISH headquarters in Hamburg and its field staff. The rest of the amount was sent abroad as subsidies.⁸⁹ Krebs' information is usually either taken as face value (Waldenfels) or dismissed as

82 Arbeitsbericht des Sekretariats der I.S.H., Hamburg 16.6.1931, RGASPI 534/5/221, 186.

83 The ISH Instructor in France was Comrade Thomson, see Briefe von Gen. Thomson, RGASPI 534/5/228, 161.

84 Letter from Adolf [Schelley] to "Werte Genossen", Hamburg 24.11.1931, RGASPI 534/5/223, 88.

85 Letter from Albert Walter to "Werte Genossen", 20.12.1931, RGASPI 534/5/231, 82.

86 Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 354–356.

87 Borgersrud, Wollweber-organisasjonen i Norge.

88 CIC FO 10501 Report R-G44-50, p. 7.

89 Valtin, *Out of the Night*, p. 307.



FIGURE 6.2 *Masthead of Laternen, the journal of the Danish section of the ISH*
SOURCE: *LANTERNEN* 6:7 (JULY 1935).



FIGURE 6.3 *Masthead of Udkiggen, mimeographed journal of the Danish section of the ISH*
SOURCE: *UDKIGGEN* 1 (1933).

being either an overstatement (Pedersen) or even bogus. In the light of both British Intelligence Sources and the Comintern files, Krebs' information is problematic. His figures for the total number of Interclubs are way too optimistic (Waldenfels even counts 48 Interclubs!) and his figures for the transfer of subsidies do not indicate whether the transfers were made on a monthly or an annual basis!

Material on the transfer of money from RILU headquarters in Moscow to Hamburg seems to indicate that Krebs overestimated the amount of Moscow's support to the ISH Secretariat. Even more worryingly, the available documentation reveals that he does not seem to have been aware of what kind of financial support was being transferred from Hamburg to the various sections. According to Adolf Schelley, the ISH Executive Committee decided at its meeting in September 1931 to drastically change the organisation's financial structures. Previously, the operations of the sections had been financed through money transfers from Hamburg, but this procedure was to be reversed and all sections

were to finance their union activities themselves. Only the expenses of the Interclubs and the local publications were to be covered by transfers from Hamburg.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, the available data is both insufficient and difficult to interpret as to give a definite answer to how much was sent on a monthly or an annual basis. In the early parts of 1931, the ISH Secretariat received a monthly total of USD 1,364 to cover its expenses, including the salaries of 2 Secretaries, 2 Instructors and 2 technical functionaries. In addition, the Secretariat received a token of USD 1,950 to be transferred as stipends to the various affiliated sections.⁹¹ Consequently, Walter would have received more than USD 3,300 per month or almost USD 40,000 per year. Perhaps this was even the case during the first half of 1931, as one document seems to indicate.⁹² However, figures concerning financial transactions in the latter part of 1932 and early 1933 reveal that this was not necessarily the case. While the ISH was to receive from March to May 1932 USD 300 per month, this amount was reduced to USD 100 in June and USD 75 in July. For the rest of the year, the allowances were dramatically increased: in August, October and December 1932 USD 2,200 per month and from January to March 1933 USD 1,828 per month.⁹³ At least in 1932, therefore, the total amount sent to the ISH Secretariat was perhaps even less than USD 20,000. On the other hand, special campaigns, such as the organisation of the ISH World Congress in 1932 were funded through extra payments from Moscow (see below).

Money was never transferred directly to Hamburg. Instead, the RILU established a secure communication network operating via Max Ziese in Berlin. Ziese would direct monthly payments to Albert Walter for the operations of the ISH and the ITUCNW. Walter, in turn, would send subsidies to the various ISH sections via his courier system.⁹⁴ Occasionally, Richard Jensen served as courier between Moscow, Berlin and Hamburg.⁹⁵

One of the ISH's main structural problems was its dual position as both an independent and a Communist-controlled union. Its links to the party apparatus were generally weak; this was the case not only in Hamburg but also characterised the relationship between the party and the various national ISH

90 Letter from Adolf [Schelley] to "Werte Genossen", Hamburg 24.11.1931, RGASPI 534/5/223, 86.

91 Monthly budget of the ISH, no date (c:a 1931), RGASPI 534/8/156, 131.

92 Budget Januar-Juni (1931), RGASPI 534/8/177, 140.

93 Monthly calculations for RILU transfers, RGASPI 534/8/216, 61, 116, 168, 200, 227, 306–307.

94 A. Walter, 25.1.33/Cross-Reference, (British) National Archives, Kew, Richmond (BNA) KV 2/1799.

95 Valtin, *Out of the Night*, p. 367; Jensen, *En omtumlet tilværelse*, p. 164.

sections throughout the world. While most, if not all, of the leading comrades were party members, the majority of the rank-and-file were syndicalists rather than Communists. At times, in Hamburg, the ISH was even at loggerheads with other Communist organisations, such as the Red Marine or even the local branch of the KPD. On the other hand, the independent position of the organisation was advantageous from a strategic and tactical perspective – it was not controlled by the local KPD or RGO apparatus in Hamburg, neither were its sections taking any directives from the national parties or red union leadership. Nevertheless, the weak relationship between the ISH and both its sections and the party was time and again considered to be a handicap, especially when the ISH Secretariat tried to direct affairs in the sections: if Hamburg failed to influence the affairs of one section, for example in the UK, ISH Secretary Walter tried to ask the party leadership to interfere – sometimes successfully but more often not as in the UK case, see below – the only avenue left was to ask the RILU and Comintern apparatus to intervene and settle the case.

Another challenge for communication (and control) was language. Only German and English were in use at the ISH Secretariat and the non-German and non-English-speaking sections continuously complained about not receiving material in Spanish, Portuguese or French, or about having trouble in translating German and English directives. Similarly, the ISH headquarters was in trouble when receiving messages and reports from its sections – it took days if not weeks to have them translated into German and vice versa. For Adolf Schelley, this was a major problem and he urged Moscow to find a solution to it and declared: “we should not be a German-English International!”⁹⁶

The ISH National Sections – An Overview

ISH sections comprised a number of affiliated organisations. According to Krebs, there were roughly 30–35 national sections affiliated with the ISH between 1931 and 1933, although many of them were not actually sections at all but rather “threads of communications”. Only a few of the national sections, including those in Germany, France and the Scandinavian countries, were financially self-sufficient. Other sections received ISH stipends for special purposes and individual actions, such as the US American section, while the British, Baltic, Chinese and other sections were completely dependent on ISH subsidies.⁹⁷

96 Letter from Adolf [Schelley] to “Werte Genossen”, Hamburg 24.11.1931, RGASPI 534/5/223, 88.

97 CIC FO 10501 Report R-G44-50, pp. 5, 10.

Although the Soviet Russian Mariners' Union was a member of the ISH, its links to the platform were weak and even downplayed. In principle, the ISH Secretariat's income was officially made up of monthly payments from the various national sections, the total sum being calculated as a certain proportion of its total membership. Although the Soviet Russian section was the largest, as reflected in the large financial support sent from Moscow to Hamburg, initially there were no Russian representatives at the Presidium of the ISH and not a single Russian comrade at the ISH Secretariat.⁹⁸ Officially, therefore, the ISH clung to the idea of it being a radical yet independent and democratic platform at which each section was to be represented.⁹⁹

The largest and best organised ISH section outside Soviet Russia was the German one, the Einheitsverband der Seeleute, Hafenarbeiter und Binnenschiffer (EV). It had been established in 1931 and was the only national section to include separate units of seamen, dockers, river sailors and fishermen. It was initially headed by Hans Koschnik. After the failed 1931 October strike of German seamen, Ernst Wollweber (1898–1967) took over the leadership of the EV; from 1932, he belonged to both the ISH Executive Committee and the ISH's inner circle. Progress seemed to be rapid. Its predecessor, the Maritime Section of the RGO counted 714 members at the end of 1930,¹⁰⁰ while the Einheitsverband listed about 40 local units with about 10,300 members at the end of 1931.¹⁰¹ In accordance with the general instructions of the RILU, the Einheitsverband had focussed on enlisting unemployed seamen and dockworkers, and had been quite successful with this. However, although impressive on paper, membership was substantially less than those of the reformed unions.¹⁰² On the other hand, the various cells that Walter had been able to establish on-board German ships constituted the core units of his "communication system"

98 Handwritten report on the October 1930 meeting in Hamburg, no date, RGASPI 534/5/219, fol. 21. However, at the ISH World Congress in 1932, two Russians were to be nominated to the ISH Presidium, see Protokoll des 1. Welt-Einheits-Kongresses der revolutionären Wassertransportarbeiter, Abt. 301 Akten des Ober-Präsidiums der Provinz Schleswig-Holstein betreffend die KPD, 301–4533 (1931–1932), LAS.

99 The relationship between the Soviet Russian maritime workers' union and the ISH needs to be analysed further and must include a different set of archival sources than the ISH files in the Comintern Archives.

100 IHBS Annual Report 1930, RGASPI 534/5/216, 77–82.

101 ISH Report for 1.1. –15.2.1932, RGASPI 534/5/230, 42–48; CIC FO 10501 Report R-G44-50, p. 38.

102 Eiber, *Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung*, pp. 186–188. See also Hartmut Rübner, "Arbeit, Milieu und Konfliktverhalten: Syndikalismus in der Schifffahrt bis in die 1930er Jahre", *Archiv für die Geschichte des Widerstandes und der Arbeit* 16 (2001), pp. 165–212.

and consequently, the German section was regarded as one of the most important of the ISH.

Other important sections were the Scandinavian ones, first and foremost the Danish and Norwegian revolutionary opposition unions. The notable presence of Norwegian functionaries, Krebs explained, was due to the fact that the Norwegian merchant fleet was at that time about the third or fourth largest in the world but that these ships rarely touched Scandinavian ports because of the lack of cargo there. Thus, a large portion of the fleet was based at Antwerp, Rotterdam and Hamburg and, consequently, the national sections of the ISH in Scandinavia could not reach their potential audience. Instead, agitation and propaganda work had to be conducted by the Scandinavian Sections of the Interclubs in these three harbours.¹⁰³

In Norway, the leading members of the ISH were Arthur Samsing, Martin Rasmussen Hjelman and Arne Halvorsen as well as Leif Foss who was in charge of the Interclub in Oslo. Apart from getting a foothold in the Norwegian merchant fleet, the ISH's ambition was to control the two key harbours in northern Norway, Narvik and Tromsø, the main outlets for Swedish iron ore.¹⁰⁴ In Denmark, on the other hand, the Danish Stokers' Union, under the leadership of Richard Jensen and Georg Hegener, was a highly appreciated affiliated union.¹⁰⁵ Jensen, acting occasionally as a courier between Moscow and Hamburg, belonged to the core leadership of the ISH and was a member of its Executive Committee. However, the Danish merchant fleet was never as important as the Norwegian one. By 1932, the campaign to establish cells on Danish and Norwegian ships had been fairly successful, e.g. about half of the crew (15 persons) on the *Marie-Maersk* (DK), one third (10) on the *Emma Maersk* (DK) and 8 out of 36 on board the *Anna Knudsen* (No) and 5 of 32 of the *Finanger's* (No) crew were members of a revolutionary trade union opposition.¹⁰⁶ A special conference was organised in Copenhagen in January 1933 to further strengthen the ISH's work in Scandinavia.¹⁰⁷ Eventually, the ISH listed 6 "Ortsabteilungen" (local units) in Norway in existence at the end of 1933.¹⁰⁸ In Sweden, too, a revolutionary trade union section had been established in the Swedish Seafarers'

103 CIC FO 10501 Report R-G44-50, pp. 6, 52.

104 On the activities of Norwegian section of the ISH, see further Borgersrud, Wollweber-organisasjonen.

105 Valtin, *Out of the Night*, p. 368; CIC FO 10501 Report R-G44-50, pp. 11–12, 16, 42.

106 List of members of the Scandinavian Section of the Inter-Club in Batumi, 1932, RGASPI 534/5/233, 20–21.

107 MR ISH September–October 1931, RGASPI 534/5/223, 26.

108 Material über die ISH und über Arbeit unter den Seeleuten und Hafenarbeiter, 20.1.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 70–88.

Union, the Sjötransportarbetarnas röda fackliga opposition, and was an affiliated ISH section and counted some 1,200 members in 1933.¹⁰⁹

The situation in the Baltic Sea region was more problematic. Communist activities were banned in Finland, and the Finnish Seafarers' Union was closely controlled by the Reformists and Socialists and was a member of the ITF.¹¹⁰ A small revolutionary trade union group existed among the seamen, although it had little influence,¹¹¹ and the ISH Secretariat had few if any direct links to it. Nevertheless, underground communist agitation was a known fact in Finland and at least part of the seamen were believed to either sympathise or back the ISH calls up until 1934 to replace the unions' leadership.¹¹² Work among Finnish seamen was concentrated in Kiel as this port was the main liaison point for traffic with Finland.¹¹³ Also, the Swedish section had been charged to focus on work on Finnish seamen (see Figure 6.4).¹¹⁴ The situation in Poland and the Baltic countries, where communist activities were also banned, was similar. The ISH tried to agitate among Polish sailors via the Interclub in Danzig (Gdansk),¹¹⁵ and in 1933 the majority of the members of the seamen's union as well as its leadership were affiliated to the ISH.¹¹⁶ Special emphasis was also directed towards gaining a foothold in the Estonian and Latvian merchant fleets.¹¹⁷ While the Estonian case proved difficult, the ISH was successful in infiltrating Latvian crews. By the end of 1932, sections for Latvian seamen existed at the Interclubs in Hamburg, Antwerp, Danzig, and Rotterdam, whereas cells or at least members existed on 32 ships, the largest ones being on the

109 Material über die ISH und über Arbeit unter den Seeleuten und Hafenarbeiter, 20.1.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 70–88.

110 Timo Soukola, *Riistorauhaa rikkomassa. Suomen Merimies-Unionin ja sen edeltäjien vaiheita 1905–2000* (Helsinki: Weilin+Göös, 2003).

111 N[iilo] Wälläri, *Myrskyssä ja myötätuulessa – I storm och medvind* (Helsinki: Suomen Merimies-Unioni, 1951), p. 75.

112 Soukola, *Riistorauhaa rikkomassa*, pp. 99, 110.

113 CIC FO 10501 Report R-G44-50, p. 6.

114 Genosse Persson, Länderbericht Schweden, RGASPI 534/5/224, 52–56.

115 Plan of Immediate Tasks, no date (probably drafted in late autumn 1930), RGASPI 534/5/219, 54–57. According to Krebs, the headquarters of the Polish national section of the ISH was also located in Danzig and served as a communications unit for the underground Communist party in Poland (CIC FO 10501 Report R-G44-50, p. 6, 15).

116 Material über die ISH und über Arbeit unter den Seeleuten und Hafenarbeiter, 20.1.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 70–88.

117 Arbeitsplan der Estnischen Sektion des Baltischen Komitees der ISH für das Halbjahr Juli – Dezember 1932; Arbeitsplan der Lettischen Sektion des Baltischen Komitees der ISH für das Halbjahr Juli – Dezember 1932, RGASPI 534/5/234, 1–4, 7–11.

Hamnarbetare!

Kamrater.

Sedan den 23 april befinner sig det finska Sjöfolket ute i strejk. De finska redarna vägrar att upprätta avtal med sjömännens förbund, vägrar kategoriskt att betala de hyror som sjöfolket kräver o. s. v. Detta har föranlett de finska sjömännen att uppta strejkkampen.

Men i Finland råder fascistisk regim, vilket gör att våra kamraters kamp genomföres under mycket svåra omständigheter.

icke ett möte kan sjöfolket avhålla för att diskutera kampsituationen och för att dra upp riktlinjer för sin fortsatta kamp, icke ett flygblad kan utges, inga sympatiaktioner från transport eller andra arbetares sida kan företagas.

I Finland regerar LAPPO!

Men detta till trots så utvecklas strejken för varje dag, besättning efter besättning lämnar fartygen och ställer sig i de strejkandes led.

Men Lappo har gott om strejkbrytare och ännu har ingen båt blivit stoppad. Varje kampåtgärd i Bandit-Finland, varje försök till att bekämpa strejkbryteriet o. s. v. är förenat med årslånga tukthusstraff.

Finlands sjömän kämpar mot redarkapitalismens hungeroffensiv och mot lappofascismen!

Kamrater.

Utan det internationella sjötransportproletariatets solidariska stöd kan icke våra finska kamrater segra.

Om vi rycker de kämpande till undsättning, om vi ser till att det icke kommer en enda utländsk sjöman ombord som strejkbrytare, om vi vägrar att ta befattning med alla finska fartyg, om icke ett kולי kommer i land eller ombord i något finskt fartyg förrän våra kamraters krav är uppfyllda, då skall de finska sjömännen segra.

Skandinaviska Transport Federationen (S. T. F.) avhöll i slutet av mars månad i Göteborg en konferens, där det bl. a. beslutades, att därest det finska sjöfolket skulle komma ut i kamp, skulle omedelbart sympatiaktioner i Skandinavien vidtagas.

Strejken har nu pågått i tre veckor, men ännu har icke herr Lindley gett någon paroll om denna sympatiaktions förverkligande.

Därför ställer vi till alla hamnarbetare parollen:

Ta upp frågan om sympatiaktioner på alla möten!

Fatta beslut om att icke lossa eller las'a något finskt fartyg så länge strejken pågår!

Kräv att »ledarna» skall infria sina löften till det finska Sjöfolket!

Finska sjöfolkets kamp, är framförallt en kamp mot fascismen.

Fatta därför också beslut om konkreta kampåtgärder mot fascismen!

Vägra att ta befattning med fartyg som för hakekorsflagga!

Inte en dag, kamrater, får gå förlorad, i tid måste den svenska arbetarklassen uppta kampen mot den allt mer växande fascistfaran. Förhindra att ett Hitlers banditvälde skall få mark också här.

Välj delega'er till den Europeiska antifascistkonferensen i Köpenhamn den 4—5 juni!

Fram för det finska sjöfolkets seger!

Fram för den antifascistiska masskampen!

Leve den internationella solidariteten!

SJÖTRANSPORTARBETARNAS R. F. O.

Arb.-kult. Tr. Sthlm 1933

FIGURE 6.4 Call to support the 1933 strike of the Finnish seamen by the Swedish section of the ISH

SOURCE: ARBEJDERBEVÆGELSENS BIBLIOTEK OG ARKIV, COPENHAGEN.

Janis Faulbaums (10 persons).¹¹⁸ One year later, the ISH claimed to control the majority of members in the Latvian seamen's union.¹¹⁹ The central person in charge of the Baltic countries was Michael Avatin (or Avotin), alias Ernst Lambert (1902–1943).¹²⁰

Together with the European Secretariat of the RILU, the ISH Secretariat was responsible for co-ordinating work among crew members onboard river steamers on the Danube. The outcome of this work was the establishment of a national ISH section in Austria and an ISH Bureau, the “Donaukommittee”, in Vienna.¹²¹ This section was to closely co-operate with the Interclub in Bratislava. There existed no national Czechoslovakian ISH section, although a strong working group under the direct direction of the ISH Secretariat in Hamburg was set up.¹²²

In Western Europe, the ISH had sections and affiliated groups in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The Port Bureaus and Interclubs in Antwerp and Rotterdam were among the most important ones of the ISH apparatus although at least the Belgian ISH section was, according to Krebs, of little importance.¹²³ Work in France, on the other hand, had been a prior objective. Interclubs existed in Rouen, Dunkirk, Bordeaux and Marseilles already during the late 1920s and the *Fédération Unitaire des Marins et Pêcheurs* (FUMP) was a key ISH section.¹²⁴ The French ports, especially Marseilles and Le Havre, were crucial exit points for contacts to Latin American countries as well as to the Francophone world, including the French colonies in the Caribbean, Africa and Asia.¹²⁵ However, the activities of the Interclubs and the French trade union opposition were often reported to be unsatisfactory and

118 Stand der Mitgliedschaft der RGO-Wassertransport auf den lettischen Schiffen am 1.12.1932, RGASPI 534/5/234, 53.

119 Avatin, Die Lage in Lettland, 12.4.1935, RGASPI 534/5/242, fol. 147–148.

120 Verhoyen, “De zaak Block en Celis”, pp. 20–21.

121 Vertrauliche Beschlüsse zur Resolution der I. Donaukonferenz der Schiffer- und Hafenarbeiter, no date (c:a 1932), RGASPI 534/5/231, fol. 85–90. The “Donaukommittee” was to direct activities along the Danube in Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Rumania.

122 CIC FO 10501 Report R-G44-50, p. 11.

123 CIC FO 10501 Report R-G44-50, p. 11.

124 Michel Piget, “Solidarité internationale et fermeture professionnelle: les horizons multiples des dockers français”, *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* 84:4 (2006), available at http://www.cairn.info/zen.php?ID_ARTICLE=MATE_084_0006 (checked 28.1.2015).

125 Report on France incl. the Latin-American Secretariat of the ISH, 30.5.1931, RGASPI 534/5/228, 108–121.

resulted in several attempts to revise and reorganise the local conditions.¹²⁶ In late 1931, the French headquarters of the ISH were moved from Paris to Rouen.¹²⁷ At the same time, the Sudanese radical Garan Kouyaté was sent to Marseille to become the third member of the FUMP Secretariat and was assigned to assist Auguste Dumay in his activities. In addition, Kouyaté was to be in charge of work among colonial seamen in France, in particular among the Black seamen and dockworkers in Marseilles.¹²⁸ Kouyaté had been working among Black seamen in Bordeaux, Marseilles and Le Havre already in 1930 when he had been charged by the French Communist Party (PCF) to establish sections of the Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre, a radical Black platform established in 1927. However, his activities were soon criticised by the PCF and the communist trade union organisation, the Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire (CGTU), for creating divisions between Black and White workers. When he started his new term in Marseille in July 1931, he was acting on the mandate of the FUMP and the newly-established ITUCNW to encourage those unions he one year earlier had created to join the FUMP and the CGTU.¹²⁹ The Interclub in Marseilles was further charged to organise an Interclub in Oran in Algeria in late 1931.¹³⁰ As a result, the FUMP was among the largest sections of the ISH, counting some 4,500 members of which 1,800 were paid-up (i.e. more than half of its members were unemployed) in late 1933.¹³¹

Another task of the French Section was to monitor work in the Mediterranean. Effort was put into revitalising the illegal Italian mariners' union, the Federazione Italiana dei Lavoratori del Mare (FILM) whose headquarters had been transferred to Marseilles.¹³² In 1931, activities in Greece initially looked

126 Resolution sur la situation actuelle, et les taches les plus paroches du Club International des Marins a Marseille, no date [c:a 1931], RGASPI 534/5/228, 122–125.

127 Letter from Adolf [Schelley] to "Werte Genossen", Hamburg 24.11.1931, RGASPI 534/5/223, 95.

128 Arbeitsbericht des Sekretariats der I.S.H., 16.6.1931, RGASPI 534/5/221, 183.

129 Adi, "The Comintern and Black Workers", pp. 238–239.

130 Letter from Adolf [Schelley] to "Werte Genossen", Hamburg 24.11.1931, RGASPI 534/5/223, 96.

131 Material über die ISH und über Arbeit unter den Seeleuten und Hafenarbeiter, 20.1.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 70–88.

132 Material on the reorganisation of the FILM, RGASPI 534/5/217; Report by Comrade Dumay on his work among Italian seamen, no date (c:a 1931), RGASPI 534/5/228, 81–90. A compilation of Italian publication published by the ISH and the F.I.L.M. is provided in Paolo Carucci, Fabrizio Dolci and Mario Missori, *Volanti antifascisti nelle carte della Pubblica sicurezza (1926–1943)*, Pubblicazioni Degli Archivi di Stato Stumenti CXXIV (Roma: Archivio Centrale Dello Stato, 1995).

promising, but soon deteriorated due to police harassment and the arrest of two of its secretaries.¹³³ A few years later it had collapsed and its headquarters was transferred to Marseilles,¹³⁴ as was also the headquarters of the (illegal) Yugoslav ISH section.¹³⁵ Work in Spain and Portugal was difficult, too, although at least in Spain substantial progress was noted in 1933. Most promising was the situation in Seville where 1,800 seamen and a similar number of dockworkers were said to have affiliated via their unions with the ISH.¹³⁶

More problematic was the situation in the United Kingdom. White and colonial seamen were initially organised through the Transport Workers Minority Movement (TWMM) and the National Minority Movement, both established in 1924. In contrast to the National Union of Seamen (NUS), the TWMM made in 1928 a special claim that coloured seamen were not to blame for unemployment or low wages. Following the directives of the RILU to establish "revolutionary trade unions", the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) initiated in 1929 the formation of a communist rank-and-file union for seamen, the Seamen Minority Movement (SMM) headed by George Hardy.¹³⁷ The SMM was not under the direct guidelines of the CPGB or Moscow although many members were Communists or under Communist influence. In late 1930, the situation looked very promising when the SMM listed activities in 16 ports.¹³⁸ The SMM, too, focussed mainly on mobilising unemployed seamen. Initially, in 1930, they had some success in South Shields when the SMM protested against the rota system and the system of registration.¹³⁹ However, in 1931 and 1932 the SMM was paralysed by a serious rift between the factions of George Hardy and Fred

133 Appeal of the ISH to all Inter-Clubs re: arrest of its two Greek secretaries, 7.4.1931, RGASPI 534/5/221, 7.

134 Material über die ISH und über Arbeit unter den Seeleuten und Hafenarbeiter, 20.1.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 70–88.

135 CIC FO 10501 Report R-G44-50, 6.

136 Material über die ISH und über Arbeit unter den Seeleuten und Hafenarbeiter, 20.1.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 70–88.

137 Høgsbjerg, *Mariner, Renegade & Castaway*, pp. 28–30.

138 List of Port Secretaries of the SMM, no date (c:a late 1930), RGASPI 534/5/219, 89. Port Secretaries existed in the following ports: Barry, Newport, Liverpool, Glasgow, Swansea, Cardiff, Leith, North Shields, Blythe, Hull, Manchester, Middlesbrough, Southampton and London.

139 Paul B. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 129; David Byrne, "Class, Race and Nation: The Politics of the 'Arab Issue' in South Shields 1919–39", in Diane Frost (ed.), *Ethnic Labour and British Imperial Trade: A History of Ethnic Seafarers in the UK* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), p. 96.

Thompson.¹⁴⁰ Part of the critique against the SMM was its failure to engage in work among Black, Arab and Asian seamen;¹⁴¹ among the fiercest critics were the Barbadian Communist and SMM member Chris Braithwaite (alias Chris Jones, 1885–1944) and Harry O'Connell from British Guyana.¹⁴²

The activities of Braithwaite aka Jones and O'Connell to organise Black seamen and dockers in the United Kingdom under the banner of the SMM was a case-point of the challenges to overcome racial barriers within labour unions. By April 1930, the SMM had formed a Committee of Coloured Seamen headed by its Secretary, the Trinidadian seaman Jim Headley; its headquarters being located at the Interclub in Poplar, London. During 1930–31, the Nigerian activist Frank Macaulay visited Liverpool and Cardiff. He was a founding member of the ITUCNW and became a catalyst for more organised activities among the Black Britons. In 1931, the ISH had instructed the SMM that work among colonial seamen was to be top priority. Braithwaite aka Jones had emerged as a leading figure in the SMM while O'Connell was organising Black seamen in Cardiff. However, neither the CPGB nor the SMM devoted much energy in work among the “colonial seamen”.¹⁴³ Neither were colonial seamen rallying *en masse* behind the SMM: by February 1932, of about 1,000 members of the SMM only 23 were “colonials”.¹⁴⁴ As a consequence, at the ISH World Congress in Altona in May 1932, George Padmore as well as Harry O'Connell criticised heavily the party and the SMM for its lukewarm, if not negative attitude towards organising the (Black) waterfront in Britain and in the African Atlantic.¹⁴⁵

In July 1932, the ISH decided to interfere and sent Richard Krebs as instructor on a special mission to reorganise work in the British harbours.¹⁴⁶ To achieve his task, Krebs stopped all payments of subsidies to the SMM; as a consequence, all of the International Seamen's Clubs in Britain were shut

140 (No author,) Denkschrift über die politischen Differenzen zwischen den Genossen Hardy und Fred Thompson, 22.III.1932, RGASPI 534/5/230, 71–75.

141 Marika Sherwood, “The Comintern, the CPGB, Colonies and Black Britons, 1920–1938”, *Science & Society* 60:2 (1996), pp. 137–163.

142 See further Høgsbjerg, “Mariner, Renegade and Castaway” and Featherstone, “Harry O'Connell.”

143 Sherwood, “The CPGB and Black Britons”, pp. 152–155; Adi, “The Comintern and Black Workers”, 233–235; Høgsbjerg, “Mariner, Renegade and Castaway”, pp. 43–44.

144 Høgsbjerg, *Mariner, Renegade & Castaway*, pp. 32–33.

145 Featherstone, “Maritime Labour”, pp. 11–13; Featherstone, “Harry O'Connell”, p. 77.

146 See further the various references in Richard Krebs' personal file, including copies of intercepted letters and evaluation reports by the British police authorities, in BNA KV 2/1102.

down.¹⁴⁷ Hardy was accused of being responsible for the “total breakdown” of the SMM,¹⁴⁸ and was forced to resign.¹⁴⁹ O’Connell, at this time belonging to the Hardy faction, was criticised for preventing his followers from joining the reorganised SMM section in Cardiff.¹⁵⁰ Chris Jones was expelled from the SMM after Krebs accused him of working as a police informant or at least on commission for the NUS.¹⁵¹ By 1933, ISH work in England was in crisis: the SMM was in a state of dissolution and a functioning committee existed only in Liverpool.¹⁵² Work among coloured seamen collapsed and in mid-1933, George Padmore closed down the Interclub in Poplar. Although this Interclub had originally been established to focus especially on coloured seamen, few of them had visited its premises and participated in its activities. Neither had London been a hub of coloured seamen at this time, in contrast to Cardiff where O’Connell had continued with his activities but not anymore under the directives of the party.¹⁵³

Organised revolutionary unions of seamen and dockers as well as sections of the ISH existed both in the USA and in Canada. In the USA, the call to form independent unions resulted in the establishment of the Marine Workers’ Progressive League in 1928, renamed in 1929 as the Marine Workers’ League (MWL). In April 1930, the MWL was reorganised and re-established as the Marine Workers’ International Union (MWIU). Its first leader was George Mink. Work was concentrated on three main regions: the Atlantic and Pacific harbours as well as the ports at the Great Lakes.¹⁵⁴ In his August 1930 report, Mink informed

147 Høgsbjerg, *Mariner, Renegade & Castaway*, p. 38.

148 (Copy, no author) Letter to Comrade Hardy, 23.7.1932, RGASPI 534/5/231, 45.

149 Letter from Albert Walter to “Werte Genossen”, 18.10.1932, RGASPI 534/5/231, 44. See further K. Morgan and A. Flinn, “George Hardy – Syndicalist and Communist”, in K. Gilbert, D. Howell and N. Kirk (eds.), *The Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol. 11* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), pp. 98–109. Surprisingly, George Hardy does not mention a single word in his memoirs about this clash and the interference of the ISH.

150 Intercepted letter from Anderson [Krebs] to “Dear Friend” [probably Albert Walter as the original letter was written in German], 23.8.1932, BNA KV 2/1102. According to British intelligence – and obvious from the documentation – Krebs used the alias James Anderson while working in the United Kingdom.

151 Intercepted letter from And[erson] to Albert Walter [English translation], 3.9.1932, BNA KV 2/1102.

152 Material über die ISH und über Arbeit unter den Seeleuten und Hafenarbeiter, 20.1.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 70–88.

153 Letter from [Arnold] W[ard], dated 26.6.1935, RGASPI 495/155/102, fol. 15.

154 See further Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, and Stephen Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea: A History of the Sailors’ Union of the Pacific, 1885–1985* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1986).

Walter that the MWIU already operated eleven Interclubs and had some 6,000 members (although only 1,600 of them paid dues).¹⁵⁵ One year later Mink was replaced by Harry Hynes as part of a larger reorganisation of the operations in the USA by the ISH. Activities were to be concentrated at four major ports, i.e. New York, Chicago, New Orleans, and San Francisco, and Mink was sent to New Orleans to be in charge of the local Interclub.¹⁵⁶

In Canada, ISH activities were concentrated on the Interclubs in Vancouver and Montreal.¹⁵⁷ However, the establishment of a revolutionary trade union proved to be more difficult. An attempt was made in 1934 at a conference in Vancouver, although this had no lasting effect.¹⁵⁸

While the Atlantic ports and the MWIU headquarters in New York were in direct contact with Albert Walter's bureau in Hamburg, the Pacific ports were part of a different system and were monitored via the ISH Pan-Pacific Secretariat and the Port Bureau as well as the Interclub in Vladivostok.¹⁵⁹ The Hamburg Bureau, the Port Bureaus in Antwerp and Rotterdam and those on the US and Canadian Pacific coast were keen to enlist Chinese and Japanese seamen. Via these networks, communications were established with the illegal Japanese revolutionary seamen's union, the Sasinkai.¹⁶⁰ The core unit for co-ordinating work in East Asia was the Secretariat in Vladivostok,¹⁶¹ in co-operation with the RILU Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat in Shanghai and its American Bureau in San Francisco.¹⁶² Through its two bureaus, the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat tried to activate not only a Pacific link and distribute its journal in

155 Pedersen, "George Mink", p. 312.

156 Letter from Adolf [Schelley] to "Werte Genossen", Hamburg 24.11.1931, RGASPI 534/5/223, 97.

157 Albert Walter's report (in German) on work in Canada, 14.6.1932, RGASPI 534/5/230, 121.

158 Royal Canadian Mounted Police Headquarters, Ottawa 20.12.1934. *Weekly Summary: Report on Revolutionary Organizations and Agitators in Canada*, pp. 458–459.

159 Fowler, *Japanese & Chinese Immigrant Activists*, pp. 83–84.

160 Instructions from "ISH Sekretariat" to "Sekretär des Inter-Klubs und Leiter der Sektion der ISH", 18.11.1932, RGASPI 534/5/235, 131–133; Fowler, *Japanese & Chinese Immigrant Activists*.

161 See Simpson, Secretary of the Pan-Pacific Secretariat of the ISH to Albert Walter, 3.3.1932 and 14.4.1932, RGASPI 534/5/235, 17–18, 31–32.

162 Letter from Albert Walter to The American Bureau, Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat, San Francisco, 9.11.1932, RGASPI 534/5/235, 107; Boon Kheng Cheah (ed.), *From PKI to Comintern, 1924–1941: The Apprenticeship of the Malayan Communist Party* (SEAP: Cornell South Asia Program 1992), pp. 18–19. On the establishment of the American Bureau in San Francisco and its work among Chinese and Japanese sailors as well as the dissemination of its magazine, *The Pan-Pacific Monthly*, until late 1932, see further Fowler, *Japanese & Chinese Immigrant Activists*, pp. 89–98.

Japan, Korea and China but also to organise Japanese and Chinese immigrant activists on the Californian waterfront.¹⁶³ In France, especially in Marseilles, focus was put on enlisting seamen from Indo-China whereas especially the Port Bureau in Antwerp was active in establishing cells among *laskars* or Indian crew members working on British and German ships. In Rotterdam, Joseph (Jozef, Joop) Rimbartus Schaap (1898–1943), who belonged to the inner circle of the ISH and was in charge of the local Interclub, had been able to establish a very effective organisation in the (Dutch) East Indies, particularly among Indonesians serving on Dutch warships. Through these various networks, communication could be established with local ISH sections in Singapore and in Java.¹⁶⁴

In addition to the above-mentioned sections and groups affiliated to the ISH, the organisation was present through a series of Interclubs in several Latin American and African countries as well as in Australia. While the situation in the Latin American and Caribbean countries remained unclear from the perspective of the ISH headquarters in Hamburg,¹⁶⁵ an ISH section had been established in Australia – the Militant Minority Movement in the Seamen's Union of Australia¹⁶⁶ – and Walter was able to directly communicate with its leadership.¹⁶⁷ Still, the situation in Australia was “absolutely unsatisfactory” from Moscow's perspective.¹⁶⁸

Least promising was the situation in Sub-Saharan Africa. Although ISH headquarters had been ordered by RILU headquarters to closely co-operate with the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW), and the ITUCNW secretaries were to run the Colonial Section of the ISH and concentrate on work among “Negro” seamen in Hamburg, little was achieved apart from establishing a series of cells onboard British ships. In 1931, it looked as if a local union in Sierra Leone would affiliate itself with the ISH – and an

163 Fowler, *Japanese & Chinese Immigrant Activists*, pp. 110–116.

164 CIC (Army Counter-Intelligence Corps) FO 10501 Report R-G44-50, pp. 6, 77.

165 Adolf [Schelley], [Albert] Walter, [?] Stein (signed), Vorschläge zur Stärkung der organisatorischen Arbeit der ISH, 3.3.1932, RGASPI 534/5/230, 52–55; Material über die ISH und über Arbeit unter den Seeleuten und Hafenarbeiter, 20.1.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 70–88. According to Krebs, there existed about seven to eight sections in Latin America, the most well organised being in Chile (CIC FO 10501 Report R-G44-50, p. 6).

166 See further Donald Sinclair Fraser, *Articles of Agreement: the Seamen's Union of Australia, 1904–1943 a study of antagonised labour*, PhD thesis, University of Wollongong, 1998.

167 Report by Kiinan [i.e. Joseph Keenan] on work in Australia, 20.6.1932, RGASPI 534/5/235, 52–56.

168 Fraser, *Articles of Agreement*, pp. 152–155.

Interclub was even listed in Freetown – but the plan was never realised.¹⁶⁹ Eventually, the ISH was able to get a foothold only in South Africa – in Cape Town and in Durban.¹⁷⁰

The Reorganisation of the Interclubs

The backbone of the ISH was the International Seamen's Club or Interclub. Some of them had been established as Port Bureaus before 1930, as organs of IPAC Transport, but they were reorganised in 1931.¹⁷¹ Only a few of them existed throughout the whole history of the ISH and at no point did they amount to 47 (or 48) in operation at the same time. A list of these Interclubs usually includes a varying number of ports in the Soviet Union, including Leningrad (established in 1922), Vladivostok (1923), Odessa, Batumi, and Murmansk, and the rest of the world, including Hamburg, Copenhagen, Oslo, Trondheim, Narvik, Gothenburg, Stockholm, Bordeaux, Marseilles, Rotterdam, Antwerp, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Shanghai. Some of the Interclubs listed in a publication of 1932, such as the Interclub in Freetown, hardly existed in reality. Others had been planned but took a long time to be established, such as the Interclubs in several Latin American ports or those in London and in Vancouver. Others were planned but were never established such as the Interclubs in Havana and Vera Cruz (Mexico). The three central Interclubs in Rotterdam, Antwerp and Marseilles were under constant reorganisation, while the situation in England and the USA fluctuated between a list of several established Interclubs in late 1930 and only few of them still in existence in 1933 (UK: only Liverpool; USA: only New York, San Francisco and New Orleans).¹⁷²

169 Adolf, Walter, Stein (signed), Vorschläge zur Stärkung der organisatorischen Arbeit der ISH, 3.3.1932, RGASPI 534/5/230, 52–55; Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 354–356.

170 Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, p. 261; Vorschläge zur Stärkung der Organisatorischen Arbeit der ISH, 3.3.1932, RGASPI 534/5/230, 55; Material über die ISH und ihre Arbeit unter den Seeleuten und Hafenarbeiter, 20.1.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 70–88.

171 (ISH instructions,) An alle Interclubs und sämtliche angeschlossene Organisationen, 4.4.1931, RGASPI 534/5/221, 1–4; Resolution über die Tätigkeit des Hamburger Internationalen Klubs, no date, filed 15.IV.1931, RGASPI 534/5/220, 155–161; Decisions of the II. Plenary Session of the Executive Committee of the ISH on the Activity and Tasks of the International Seamen's Clubs, September 1931, RGASPI 534/5/224, 191–203.

172 Report on activities, no author, no date, filed 28.II.34, RGASPI 534/5/236, 171–180. According to the report, Interclubs should again be organised in London, Cardiff, North or South Shields as well as in Le Havre, Oran and Dunkirk.

The Interclubs were the nodes of the ISH's world-wide communication network and were directly under the ISH Secretariat and not subordinated to the national sections.¹⁷³ The key aim of their reorganisation was to broaden their activities. Basically, each club was to consist of several national sections, each of them targeting a particular group of foreign seamen. In practice, only a few of these Interclubs ever listed multiple sections. The most thorough reorganisation occurred in Hamburg where an Anglo-American,¹⁷⁴ a Scandinavian,¹⁷⁵ a Latin, and a Colonial section were set up.¹⁷⁶ Until mid-1931, George Hardy was in charge of the Anglo-American section and Auguste Dumay of the Latin section. Work at the Scandinavian section was at first handled by Arthur Samsing and, after his arrest and expulsion from Germany in 1930, by Leif Foss who was replaced by Hermann Knüfken in 1931.¹⁷⁷ In addition, there was a Baltic section but it was initially not located in the ISH building; Michel Avotin (alias Ernst Lambert) either worked or was connected to this section.¹⁷⁸ The Colonial section was to focus on work among Chinese, Indian and "Negro" (i.e. Caribbean and African) seamen calling at Hamburg. Initially, it was headed by the Chinese Comrade Liao (Liao Chengzhi¹⁷⁹) and the African American James W. Ford, the Secretary of the ITUCNW, whose bureau was located in a room behind the Interclub in the building of the Port Bureau/ISH at 8, Rothesoodstrasse.¹⁸⁰ However, one consequence of the Executive Committee meeting in September 1931 was the reorganisation of work among colonial seamen;¹⁸¹ thereafter, the Interclub, together with the Einheitsverein, was to focus on the

173 Draft Decision: Basic Principles, no date (c:a 1930), RGASPI 534/5/219, 81–84.

174 Interestingly, Krebs gives no information about this section in his interrogation report!

175 Krebs gives its name as the "special Scandinavian Bureau" but I have not found any references to such a name in the Comintern files.

176 Resolution über die Tätigkeit des Hamburger Internationalen Klubs, no date, filed 15.3.1931, RGASPI 534/5/220, 158–161.

177 Resolution über die Tätigkeit des Hamburger Internationalen Klubs, no date, filed 15.3.1931, RGASPI 534/5/220, 159.

178 CIC FO 10501 Report R-G44-50, pp. 6, 14. According to Krebs, there existed a Finnish section in the Inter-Club in Kiel but his information is vague – he himself seems to have had no first hand information about its existence and so far I have found no traces of its activities among the Comintern files.

179 Fowler, *Japanese & Chinese Immigrant Activists*, p. 89.

180 Plan of Work Outlined for the Seamen's International Amongst Colonial Workers. Immediate tasks., no date, filed 28.II.1931, RGASPI 534/5/220, 77–82; Resolution über die Tätigkeit des Hamburger Internationalen Klubs, no date, filed 15.3.1931, RGASPI 534/5/220, 159.

181 "Tagung der Seeleute-Internationale", *Rote Front* Nr 177, 13.9.1931.

Indian and Chinese seamen whereas the organisation of “Negro” seamen were to be the joint responsibility of the Interclub and the ITUCNW.¹⁸²

The Interclubs served first and foremost as centres of mass agitation. For example, the Interclub in Hamburg listed in April 1931 the following activities: 333 ships visited and 5,000 seamen visited the club. The club organised 15 large gatherings, 5 information evenings, 25 concerts, 18 sport events, 9 leisure evenings as well as one legal and one illegal demonstration.¹⁸³ However, as noted above, the activities of the Interclubs were constantly being reorganised. In Hamburg, for example, 4-week special training courses for Anglophone, Scandinavian and “Negro” seamen were introduced in 1932.¹⁸⁴

Despite some early successes in the reorganisation of the Interclub, George Hardy rapidly became dissatisfied with the conditions in Hamburg. Although being one of the largest ports in the world, Hamburg had, according to Hardy, several severe disadvantages. The first one was that very few colonial seamen called at Hamburg and none of them had the port as his place of residence. The second hindrance was tied to the first one: few British, Dutch and American ships called at Hamburg and, among the Scandinavians, the Norwegian merchant fleet – which itself was one of the largest in the world during the early 1930s – called in to British rather than to German ports. Hamburg, reasoned Hardy therefore, was not the ideal hub for the ISH and the therefore proposed that ISH headquarters be moved to London.¹⁸⁵ However, Hardy’s proposal was rejected, and resulted in him being distanced (though not yet removed) from the ISH leadership in 1931.¹⁸⁶

Conditions in the Interclub in Marseilles at 10, Rue Fauchier were also at times problematic. This Interclub had a key role in organising Arab, Black, Vietnamese and Chinese seamen. In addition, there were sections for Italian,

182 ISH, Decisions of the 11 Plenary Session of the Executive Committee of the ISH on the Activity and Tasks of the International Seamen’s Clubs, September 1931, RGASPI 534/5/224, 197–198.

183 ISH MR April 1931, RGASPI 534/5/221, 57–63.

184 Adolf, Walter, Stein (signed): Vorschläge zur Stärkung der organisatorischen Arbeit der ISH, 3.3.1932, RGASPI 534/5/230, 52–55. The activities of the Interclubs have received little scholarly attention, apart from Hartmund Rübner’s study on the Interclub in Bremen, see Hartmund Rübner, “Interklub, Bordzelle, revolutionärer Seeleutestreik: Die ‘Revolutionäre Gewerkschaftsopposition’ in der Seeschifffahrt während der Weltwirtschaftskrise”, *Archiv für die Geschichte des Widerstandes und der Arbeit* 17 (2003), pp. 101–130.

185 Hardy to Lozovsky, Hamburg 30.3.1931, RGASPI 534/5/220, 139–142.

186 The Situation, the Work and the Tasks of the ISH – Resolution on the Report of Comrade Hardy and Walter, 12.VI.1931, RGASPI 534/5/221, 114–123.

Spanish, Yugoslavian and Greek mariners.¹⁸⁷ Garan Kouyaté, whose transfer to Marseilles had been decided in Hamburg, was to work jointly for the ISH and for the ITUCNW.¹⁸⁸ He soon expanded his activities to include work in other Interclubs and was fairly successful in his activities. In late 1932, he had been able to organise some 200 Africans, mainly in Marseilles and Bordeaux.¹⁸⁹ In the autumn, the relationship between Kouyaté and the French communists quickly deteriorated, resulting in a quarrel about work among colonial subjects in France. Kouyaté, who at this point had moved to Paris, also refused to return to Marseilles and reorganise work at the Interclub. Kouyaté's refusal caused concern among the ISH leadership but it was his rift with the Communist leadership that led to his final expulsion from the Communist Party in 1933.¹⁹⁰

The third strategically important Interclub was located at 7a, Willemskade in Rotterdam. It had been established in October 1931 and reorganised in April 1931. Thereafter it contained three sections. A special focus was placed on Chinese and Indonesian seamen, as this Interclub was in charge of connections with Indonesia and South-East Asia. Outside Europe, key Interclubs existed in New York, San Francisco and Shanghai. In New York, the ISH had opened its headquarters a few doors away from the Seamen's Church Institute, described as the Red "stewpot" as it was a combined lunch counter, boarding house, library and propaganda centre.¹⁹¹ The Interclub in San Francisco was, together with the one in Shanghai, the ISH's Pacific hub. During the mid-1930s, the ISH made an attempt to expand its activities in the region by sending the Danish activist Gustav Langfors to Shanghai. Langfors, who had previously worked at the Interclubs at Hamburg, Bremen and Copenhagen, was ordered to open an Interclub in Shanghai; it was to exist from 1934 to 1937 when Langfors left China and returned via New York to Copenhagen.¹⁹²

187 ISH, Decisions of the II Plenary Session of the Executive Committee of the ISH on the Activity and Tasks of the International Seamen's Clubs, September 1931, RGASPI 534/5/224, 199.

188 NN to "Lieber Freund Pechmann", 13.6.1931, RGASPI 534/5/221, 155–161. Pechman was the alias of Leow (Leo) Smolianski who was in charge of the RILU Bureau in Berlin and was Albert Walter's liaison in Moscow.

189 Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 357–358.

190 Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, p. 596.

191 Archie Green, *Wobblies, Pile Butts, and Other Heroes: Laborlore Explorations* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 169.

192 Rapport fra Københavns Opdagelsepolititi, 11.2.1941, Wollwebersagen Pakke 2, Politiets Efterretningstjeneste, Danish National Archives, Copenhagen.

The Clandestine Network: The Ship Cells

If the International Seamen's Clubs were the backbone of the ISH, then the ship cells were its core units.¹⁹³ Albert Walter was said to have established a card index listing all ships with ISH cells but the whereabouts of this index today are not known – the German police was never able to confiscate it and it appears that it was never transferred to Moscow either.

The most reliable cells included those onboard German merchant ships although their activities became increasingly restricted from 1929 due to the agitation of the Nazi seamen's organisation. Seamen who were known to be Communists were disregarded and not hired by the shipowners. Walter's network onboard the German merchant fleet was shrinking and he was urged to establish an international communications network that was capable of taking action in case of a crisis.¹⁹⁴

The loss of cells and contact persons onboard German ships was counter-weighted by an increasing number of cells on other nations' ships. While the Norwegian, Danish and Dutch cells continued to be well-functioning during the early 1930s, the infiltration among crew members on British ships was more difficult, particularly due to the weak performance of the SMM and the ISH in the United Kingdom. Initially, a perfect basis for work on British ships, especially among the Lascars, was Hamburg and Antwerp.¹⁹⁵ However, the German police uncovered this clandestine channel of communication between Europe and India already in 1929.¹⁹⁶

The reorganisation of the Interclub in Hamburg in 1930 resulted in a vitalisation and diversification of Albert Walter's communications network. The cornerstone of this new strategy involved initially focussing on Chinese and Japanese crew members.¹⁹⁷ Soon Walter boasted of having established numerous new cells and secured direct communications with China,¹⁹⁸ and by the end of 1930 he informed Moscow that the establishment of a new network

193 An account on the operations of a ship cell is provided by Hartmut Rübner, "Das Bordzellenbuch des Dampfers BOCKENHEIM", *Archiv für die Geschichte des Widerstandes und der Arbeit* 17 (2003), pp. 131–150.

194 Bericht der eingesetzten Untersuchungs-Kommission zur Kontrolle der Arbeit und aller damit zusammenhängenden Aufgaben des Hafenbüros Hamburg, 28.7.1930, RGASPI 534/5/216, 40–51.

195 Valtin, *Out of the Night*, p. 214.

196 P.F. 41314, 18.3.29, BNA KV 2/1799 Albert Walter, personal file.

197 IHBS MR January 1930, IHBS MR March 1930, RGASPI 534/5/216, 10–12, 17–18.

198 Bericht über die Arbeit unter den chinesischen Seeleuten, 1–31.3.1930 & 3–28.4.1930, RGASPI 534/5/216, 36, 37.

connecting the ISH Secretariat and the national sections and communications centres was making good progress.¹⁹⁹ Work among Black seamen was added to the obligations of the Interclub in Hamburg after the establishment of the headquarters of the ITUCNW in the ISH building in November 1930. With a fairly good result: within a few months, Ford had established about a dozen cells on British ships.²⁰⁰

However, Hamburg was never a major hub for work among Black seamen and this part of its operations had ceased by the end of 1931. A new change in tactics was planned in March 1932 but was neglected by George Padmore, the new secretary of the ITUCNW, as he was busy establishing his own global network.²⁰¹ The Chinese Comrade who worked for the colonial section, on the other hand, was making good progress and had expanded his sphere of influence to include activities in Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Antwerp, London, the USA and the West Indies.²⁰²

Nevertheless, communications between Hamburg and the Pacific Rim remained problematic. Both the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat in San Francisco and the Pan-Pacific Secretariat of the ISH in Vladivostok had failed to establish extensive links connecting the Pacific ports, and their work among Asian sailors had been particularly weak.²⁰³ Consequently, communications between Hamburg and the sections in East and South-East Asia were difficult to operate, and Walter instructed the comrades in Vladivostok and San Francisco to do their utmost to establish secure connections.²⁰⁴

Hamburg – Copenhagen: The ISH in the Shadow of Global Politics

Although Albert Walter and Adolf Schelley ran the ISH's day-to-day operations, strategic and tactical planning had to be organised at sessions of the Executive Committee. While the first session of the Executive Committee in October

199 ISH MR November 1930, RGASPI 534/5/219, 45–47.

200 See further Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, p. 352.

201 Adolf, Walter, Stein (signed), Vorschläge zur Stärkung der organisatorischen Arbeit der ISH, 3.3.1932, RGASPI 534/5/230, 52–55. On Padmore's activities, see Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 347–349.

202 Walter, Kurzer Bericht des chinesischen Mitarbeiters im Inter-Club Hamburg, 12.11.1932, RGASPI 534/5/231, 72.

203 Report from Albert Walter to "Werte Genossen", 2.12.1932, RGASPI 534/5/231, 78–81.

204 Instructions from Walter to the American Bureau of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat in San Francisco, 9.11.1932; Instructions from Walter to the Secretary of the ISH Section in Vladivostok, 18.11.1932, RGASPI 534/5/235, 107, 131–132.

1930 mainly concentrated on launching the newly established platform,²⁰⁵ its second session in September 1931 included a lengthy discussion about the progress of work and closed with a call to organise an international congress of seamen and dockworkers.²⁰⁶ The date for the congress was set to the latter half of May 1932 and it was to be convened in Copenhagen (see Figure 6.5).²⁰⁷

Back in Moscow, the RILU Budget Commission prepared a budget for the congress. Funds were needed to cover 250 delegates to be invited for 5 days, and an additional 100 participants for 8 days. In total, about USD 20,000 were budgetted to cover the expenses of a total of 296 delegates.²⁰⁸ Nevertheless, the RILU Secretariat also took into consideration the possibility of a negative reply from the Danish authorities and urged the organisers to prepare an alternative plan and venue if Copenhagen turned out to be impossible. Most important, the Secretariat stressed, was the legality of the congress: an illegal event was under no circumstances to be preferred.²⁰⁹

Not surprisingly, the Danish authorities rejected the ISH's application. The organisers then had to find a replacement venue and in the end managed to convince the local authorities in Altona, one of Hamburg's suburbs, but administratively part of Prussia, to give their backing to the new congress venue.²¹⁰ Despite police harassment and all sorts of difficulties, some 173 delegates from 30 nations finally made it to Altona where the Congress was convened from the 21st to the 24th May 1932.²¹¹

The Congress was a typical masquerade by the Comintern: although the overwhelming majority of the delegates were non-Communist, the Communists' "fraction" or minority held a tight control over every meeting.²¹² In public, the congress downplayed the revolutionary aim of the ISH and the organisers were strictly ordered to make sure that the vocabulary of the proclamations and presentations did not arouse the suspicion of the police.²¹³

205 Bericht über die Exekutive-Sitzung der ISH, 3.10.1930, RGASPI 534/5/219, 6–9.

206 Zweite Plenartagung der Exekutive der ISH, 10–12.9.1931, RGASPI 534/5/224, 1–190.

207 Instruktionen für die Kommission zur Leitung des Internationalen Kongresses der ISH, Vertraulich, 11.5.1932, RGASPI 534/5/232, 33–35.

208 Kostenvorschlag zum 1. Weltkongress der ISH, RGASPI 534/8/157, fol. 192.

209 See §19, Instruktionen für die Kommission zur Leitung des Internationalen Kongresses der ISH, 11.5.1932, RGASPI 534/5/232, fol. 35.

210 Kongress der ISH, RGASPI 534/5/232, 75–76.

211 (ISH), *De internationale Søtransportarbejderes Verdens-Enhedskongres og dens Beslutninger!* (Copenhagen, s.a. [ca. 1930]), p. 1.

212 Valtin, *Out of the Night*, pp. 313–314.

213 §14, Instruktionen für die Kommission zur Leitung des Internationalen Kongresses der ISH, 11.5.1932, RGASPI 534/5/232, fol. 35.



FIGURE 6.5 *ISH call for the world congress of seamen and harbour workers*

SOURCE: COVER OF PUBLICATION *EINHEITSKONGRESS DES WASSERTRANSPORTPROLETARIATS DER WELT*, 20 MAI 1932 IN HAMBURG. KLEINE BIBLIOTHEK DER ISH NR. 2 (HAMBURG: INTERNATIONALE DER SEELEUTE UND HAFENARBEITER, 1932).

A central theme discussed at the plenary sessions concerned living conditions onboard and demands for seven-hour working days, unjust working conditions and demands for a just salary. Another theme was the right to form unions and the right to strike onboard on ships, their techniques and under what circumstances one was to pursue a certain tactic. A third general theme was what positions the seamen were to take in a future conflict or even war; a fourth theme was the potential of the radicals to gain more influence in unions that were controlled by the Social Democrats. On the other hand, far away from the public, meetings and conferences of various commissions were held behind the scenes in which only the inner circle of the Communists and trusted activists participated.²¹⁴ While Krebs in his over-critical autobiography presented the Congress as a big fake,²¹⁵ Richard Jensen regarded it as the peak of the revolutionary waterfront.²¹⁶ Nevertheless, an immediate internal report was highly critical of the outcome of the Congress, not least of the limited participation from the colonies.²¹⁷ At the Congress itself, George Padmore had criticised the ISH for its lukewarm attitude towards colonial seamen and vehemently demanded that the ISH and its affiliated sections put an effort to organise them.²¹⁸

If the year 1932 was marked by the public demonstration of the ISH at its World Congress and heralded the global fight for decent working conditions, 8-hour working days and against cuts in wages which shipowners in every country were attempting to impose as well as unified actions against war preparations, the following years witnessed the weaknesses of the organisation. The ISH failed both in terms of counteracting the Nazi onslaught in Germany and in being a global player in national strikes and a counter-weight to the ITF.

The 1932 World Congress was conducted in the shadow of the political fragmentation and unrest in Germany and the intensification of the worldwide economic depression. For Bolshevik analysts, the economic and political instability was a clear sign of the breakdown of the capitalist system and that the "class against class" strategy was to be fully implemented. Thus, both the ISH and its national sections saw the reformist organisations, the ITF and

214 Nørgaard, *Revolutionen der udeblev*, pp. 94–95; Eiber, *Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung*, pp. 183–184.

215 Valtin, *Out of the Night*, pp. 314–316.

216 Jensen, *En omtumlet tilværelse*; Nørgaard, *Revolutionen der udeblev*, pp. 94–95.

217 Kongress der ISH, RGASPI 534/5/232, 75–76. The American, English and Spanish delegations, in particular, were criticised for their weak performance at the Congress, whereas the German organisers were blamed for the belated preparations of the venue.

218 Høgsbjerg, *Mariner, Renegade & Castaway*, p. 36.

its reformist national unions, as their main enemies. Any loss in a national strike – such as the German 1931 October strike or the 1933 strikes in Sweden and Finland – was interpreted as a betrayal by the “Social Fascist” unions and their leadership (see Figure 6.6). Little time was spent on a critical reflection of the shortcomings of its own tactics and strategies. Instead, the early 1930s were marked by a restless jumping from one campaign to another.²¹⁹

Nevertheless, the ISH leadership was not blind and was able to read the signs of the times in Germany. According to Jensen, the inner circle of the ISH discussed already at the World Congress at a closed meeting the need to prepare for its underground existence and operations in Germany. In the case of the ISH being declared illegal by the German authorities, the Secretariat was to be moved to Copenhagen.²²⁰ In December 1932, Albert Walter called for a session of the Extended Bureau of the Executive Committee to be held in Copenhagen in early January 1933.²²¹ Whether the critical situation in Germany and the preparations for the transfer of the ISH Secretariat were discussed at this meeting in Copenhagen is not known.

Walter and his comrades in Hamburg had taken precautions for the worst case scenario. When the Nazis and the German police started its crackdown on the communists in February 1933, the ISH Secretariat had already started to transfer its documents and archives to safe places all over Hamburg. The ISH building was empty when the police raided it on the 6th of March 1933. Over the following weeks, the ISH material as well as the last transfer of money from Moscow were moved in small instalments to Copenhagen where Richard Jensen organised the new ISH headquarters in the office building Vesterport at Vesterbrogade, under cover of being the office of the engineering company A. Selvo & Co.²²² The engineering company was also the cover of the RILU

219 Eiber, *Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung*.

220 Nørgaard, *Revolutionen der udeblev*, p. 95, 97.

221 Letter from Albert Walter to “Werte Genossen”, 2.12.2012, RGASPI 534/5/231, 78–81.

222 Cross-reference: Jensen, Richard, original in O.F. 2/13 Vol. 2 (52a), 19.4.1933, BNA KV2/2158 Richard Jensen personal file; letter from Hermann Knüffken and Kurt Lehmann to Edo Fimmen, Antwerpen 24.4.1936, reproduced in Knüffken, *Von Kiel bis Leningrad*, pp. 329–330; Valtin, *Out of the Nigh*, pp. 434–435; Jensen, *En omtumlet tilværelse*, p. 104; Eiber *Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung*, p. 581; Rosenfeldt, *Verdensrevolutionens generalstad*, pp. 203–204; Rosenfeldt, “Komintern og det hemmelige apparat”, p. 104. The headquarters of the WEB, the Western European Bureau of the Comintern, had also been relocated to Denmark; the transfer of which from Berlin to Copenhagen had been organised by Wollweber. Three ISH-activists were linked to the WEB bureau: Richard Jensen, who was in charge of its financial section, Michel Avatin, who was in charge of its security apparatus, and Wollweber, who was in charge of its organisation apparatus. The fourth – political – section



FIGURE 6.6 "Lessons from the seamen's strike" – pamphlet on the 1933 strike published by the Swedish section of the ISH

SOURCE: COVER OF PUBLICATION *SJÖSTREJKENS LÄRDOMAR: R.F.O. I KAMP* (STOCKHOLM: SJÖTRANSPORTARBETARNAS R.F.O., 1933).

European Bureau which had been moved from Berlin to Copenhagen in a similar clandestine action in March 1933. Its key person was Comrade Pechmann alias Leow Smolianski, Albert Walter's liaison.

The Nazi takeover was a severe blow to the ISH as its largest and hitherto most efficient unit, the EV, had from then on to operate outside Germany, as all Communist activities had been declared illegal by early March 1933. The closure of the ISH Secretariat and Interclub in Hamburg meant that the Comintern's global communication network was seriously damaged as all operations via Germany had come to a standstill. Leading members of the ISH, EV and other Communist organisations as well as the KPD were arrested by the police and sent to concentration camps, among them Albert Walter and Edgar André. But were structures so seriously damaged that the network collapsed?

Activities in Copenhagen were quickly back to "normal".²²³ Most of its inner circle, including Adolf Schelley, had been able to escape to Denmark and, together with Richard Jensen, Richard Rast and Gustav Langfors, constituted thereafter the ISH Secretariat,²²⁴ whereas Hermann Knüfken was sent to Rotterdam to organise illegal activities in Germany. Wollweber had remained in Hamburg but received an order from Moscow in August 1933 to relocate to Copenhagen and to take charge of the ISH.²²⁵ As in Hamburg, the ISH Secretariat received financial support from Moscow; according to Knüfken, the monthly subsidies amounted to 10,000 Reichsmark.²²⁶ Although the ISH Secretariat planned to continue its global operations, it soon had to realise that major structural changes were necessary as its financial resources were extremely limited. As a result, the technical instructors were abolished and the subsidies to the national sections as well as the financial support to strikers and strike campaigns had to be cancelled.²²⁷

The inability of the ISH to fully engage and monitor national strikes became evident during the seamen's strikes in Sweden and Finland in 1933. In both cases, the ISH played a bizarre role. In Sweden, the ISH Secretariat was able to

was claimed to be headed by the Finn Otto V. Kuusinen (Dankaart and van Doorslaer, "De activiteiten"). However, according to Nørgaard, there is no evidence that Kuusinen ever headed this unit in Copenhagen (Nørgaard, *Revolutionen der udeblev*, p. 136).

223 Report by Adolf on the work of the ISH Secretariat in Copenhagen, 10.5.1933, RGASPI 534/5/236, 53–54.

224 BNA KV2/2158, 26.7.33.

225 Borgersrud, *Die Wollweber-Organisation*, p. 42.

226 Eiber, *Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung*, p. 677.

227 Jensen and Adolf, Umstellung des ISH-Budgets, no date, (c:a August 1933), RGASPI 534/5/236, 81–85.

send instructors to monitor the strike activities of the RFO, certainly Richard Krebs and probably also Gustav Langfors,²²⁸ although with little success.²²⁹ In Finland, the ISH Secretariat was not even informed about the plans of the Finnish Seamen's Union to start a strike and therefore initially assumed a negative attitude towards the Finnish strike.²³⁰ It was too late when the ISH did finally change its position in the Finnish case and called for an intensified blockade of Finnish ships.²³¹ Not surprisingly, therefore, neither the ISH nor the underground Finnish organisations nor the Swedish ISH section were in any position to challenge the Reformists' position within the unions.²³²

Even more problematic than the disappointing performance of the ISH in the Nordic strikes was the fact that its global system was difficult to operate from Copenhagen. The town itself was not an international port and communications with the various national sections were more difficult to monitor from Copenhagen than from Hamburg. As a result, those national sections that were still in operation and did not depend on ISH subsidies, such as the MWIU, started to sever its ties from the ISH centre – not least due to the fact that the comrades in Copenhagen had not sent any instructions for months.²³³ Thus, the ISH Secretariat received information about the 1934 harbour strike in San Francisco only through the RILU!²³⁴ In fact, even the connections with Moscow were not functioning well and Adolf Schelley complained in October 1933 about not having received any literature from Moscow to be distributed to the Interclubs for the past three months.²³⁵

228 Bilaga 6, Den röda fackliga oppositionen (RFO) organisation och verksamhet i Sverige (Juni 1933), Kommittén ang. statsfientlig verksamhet, Kartog 1, Swedish National Archives (SNA), Stockholm (Krebs); Raport fra Københavns Opdagelsepolit, 11.2.1941, Wollwebersagen Pakke 2, Politiets Efterretningstjenste, DNA (Langfors).

229 Bengt Svensson & Elisabeth Svensson, "Sjömansstrejken 1933", *Arkiv 2* (1972), pp. 1–24, available at <http://www.marxistarkiv.se/sverige/facket/svensson-sjomansstrejken33.pdf> (checked 16.5.2015).

230 Soukola, *Riistorauhaa rikkomassa*, p. 99.

231 ISH Secretariat, Instructions regarding the Finnish Seamen's strike, 4.5.1933, RGASPI 534/5/236, 55.

232 See further Svensson & Svensson, "Sjömansstrejken 1933", and Soukola, *Riistorauhaa rikkomassa*, pp. 99–110.

233 (Copy) Letter from the MWIU to Richard Jensen, no date, filed 22.XI.1933, RGASPI 534/5/236, 126.

234 (Copy) Letter from George to the RILU Secretariat, filed 7.VII.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 171–172.

235 Adolf and Schmidt (signed) to "Liebe Freunde", 14.10.1933, RGASPI 534/5/236, 120.

Another disappointment was the disturbing news about the activities of Albert Walter, who had been released by the police in July 1934. His disloyal behaviour had already been noted while he was in the concentration camp, and when he stood as a witness in a trial against Communist comrades, it was proven that he had become a renegade.²³⁶ Consequently, he was excluded from the ISH.²³⁷

Wollweber was in charge of the “legal” Secretariat and its operations until the end of 1933, when he was called to Moscow.²³⁸ The Executive Committee made two attempts to reorganise the operations of the ISH. As the Secretariat initially did not function legally in Copenhagen – and the Illegal Secretariat had still to be reactivated – the first secret meeting was organised in connection with the World Congress against War and Fascism held in Paris in June 1933.²³⁹ A second secret gathering took place one year later in Antwerp.²⁴⁰ The outcome was that the “legal” Secretariat of the ISH would be reorganised and moved to Paris, while the “illegal” Secretariat, headed by Adolf Schelley, was to be placed in R[otterdam].²⁴¹

The Liquidation of the Radical Waterfront

By the end of 1933, the organisational structure of the ISH was on paper still impressive. The German secret police even believed that the ISH was capable to upkeep its vertical and horizontal connections to its various “bureaus”. In their mind, the ISH was an organisation with an hierarchical structure: on top the ISH Secretariat in Copenhagen, connected to seven “bureaus” which in turn were in touch with the national sections, namely the “Pan-American Bureau”²⁴² in New York, the “Scandinavian and Baltic Bureau”²⁴³ in

236 Report regarding Albert Walter's behaviour, 2.8.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 212–213.

237 Letter from Adolf Schelley, 14.7.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 207.

238 Borgersrud, *Die Wollweber-Organisation*, p. 43.

239 CIC FO 10501 Report R-G44-50, p. 5.

240 Letter from Henri to “Liebe Freunde”, 13.6.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 145; S.I.S. report, 20.6.1934, BNA KV2/2158.

241 Report on the meeting of the ISH Executive Committee, 13.6.1934; Letter from Adolf and [Edgar?] André to the RILU General Council, 26.10.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 145–152, 253–266. Reference to the location of the Illegal Secretariat is found in *Vorschläge der Kommission über die Arbeit der ISH*, 2.12.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 293.

242 National sections in the USA, Canada, Argentina, Uruguay and Cuba.

243 National sections in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Poland and Latvia.

Copenhagen, the “Continetal and British Bureau”²⁴⁴ in Copenhagen, the “Pan-Pacific Bureau”²⁴⁵ in San Francisco, the “Soviet Bureau”²⁴⁶ in Moscow and the “International Negro Committee” in Paris. What the German authorities had missed was that the ISH by 1934 had started to disintegrate.²⁴⁷

An attempt to revitalise the operations of the ISH was planned at the same time as the Comintern and the RILU had started to redefine the “class against class” strategy in 1934. In a resolution issued by the XIII Plenum of the ECCI in December 1933, the communist parties were urged to focus on the workers on the waterfront in the struggle against the transportation of war materials, against the attack of “shipowning capital and fascism” and on work among transport workers (see Figure 6.7). The Central Committees as well as the leading organs of the Communist fractions in the trade unions parties were each to appoint a member with the task to organise this work as well as to establish control commissions in the harbours. The role of the ISH was not commented apart from that it was to receive assistance from the Comintern in its demonstrations against vessels flying fascist flags and its work on German, Japanese and Italian ships. The parties rather than the ISH were given the task to organise the seamen and harbour workers; it was the task of the party and the Communist fraction in the trade unions to lead the attack against the ITF. Also, the resolution highlighted the need to pay serious attention to the work among colonial seamen and harbour workers. Special instructors were to be placed at the Interclubs directly working with the colonial seamen and colonial commissions were to be formed directly under the Central Committees of the parties.²⁴⁸ The outcome of this process was an ill-defined attempt to introduce a return to the “united front” strategies. First steps were taken in the USA where the MWIU was dissolved in 1934.²⁴⁹ While such tactics had been implemented

244 National sections in the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Belgium, Portugal, Switzerland, Greece, Czechoslovakia, Italy and Germany.

245 National sections in China, Japan, the Philipinens and Hawaii.

246 National Sections in Turkey, Bulgaria, Rumania, Manchuria and Korea.

247 Die Organisation der ISH, 1937, RGASPI 458/9/130, 9. The document is a chart depicting the organisational structre of the ISH. It had been drawn by the German secret police in 1937, propbably based on information provided by Richard Krebs. However, the chart does not reflect the state of affairs in 1937 but 1933/34 when the ISH Secretariat was located in Copenhagen. The “Negro Committee”, i.e., the ITUCNW, was at this time an independent organisation with its headquarters in Paris and, in 1934, in Antwerp. See further Chapter 7 in this volume.

248 Resolution on work among Seamen and Harbour Workers, 15.12.1933, RGASPI 495/4/272, 58–60.

249 See further Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*.



FIGURE 6.7 *Appeal of the ISH executive committee for anti-Fascist demonstration on August 1st*

SOURCE: ARBEJDERBEVÆGELSENS BIBLIOTEK OG ARKIV, COPENHAGEN.

in France and Spain already in 1934,²⁵⁰ they received official backing first at the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern in 1935.

The Comintern's unclear general political strategy caused much confusion among the rank-and-file members in the various Communist organisations, including the ISH. It is even possible that someone in Moscow was already making plans for the liquidation of the ISH. This, at least, was the order Wollweber received when he returned from Moscow to Denmark in the spring of 1934. While Wollweber was to orchestrate the seamen's strike in Denmark, the operations of the ISH were to be further down-scaled, the legal Secretariat to be transferred to Antwerp and Shelley was to be in charge of the remnants of the ISH.²⁵¹ Antwerp, Rotterdam and Paris – the reconstruction of the locations of the “legal” and “illegal” secretariat is still unclear. According to Borgersrud, the ISH Secretariat was transferred from Copenhagen to Antwerp in 1933/34, a decision that had been made already in the autumn of 1933.²⁵² However, other documents refer to Tillon (a leading member of the French mariners' union), Jensen and Schaap as members of the “legal” Secretariat, while Shelley together with Comrades André (Adolf Deter), Georges (Richard Rast?) and Verkest (from Belgium; he was in charge of the Interclub in Antwerp) were members of the “illegal” Secretariat.²⁵³ Wollweber, who barely escaped an attempt by the Gestapo to kidnap him in Copenhagen in May 1934, decided to move to Sweden, and he asked the Executive Committee of the Comintern for a transfer to the Soviet Union, which was granted.²⁵⁴

The “legal” Secretariat was eventually relocated to 33 rue de la Grange-aux-Belles in Paris in 1935 and was amalgamated with the “illegal” one. At this point, five core members remained: Adolf Shelley, Richard Jensen, Adolf Deter, Luigi Polano and Richard Rast.²⁵⁵ Also, the final list of members of the Executive Committee is from 1935 and includes 12 members, none of them German. Instead, two of them – Tillon and Le Winter – were from France, reflecting the structural changes of the ISH. The other members came from the UK (Robson),

250 Die RGI über die Einheitsfront und die Einheit der Gewerkschaftsbewegung, 2.10.1934, RGASPI 495/4/313, 98–100.

251 Erich Wollweber, unpublished memoirs, copy in Staffan Lamms arkiv, Arbetarrörelsens bibliotek och arkiv (ARAB).

252 Borgersrud, Wollweber-organisasjonen i Norge, p. 86; Borgersrud, *Die Wollweber-Organisation*, p. 43, 4961.

253 Letter from Henri to “Liebe Freunde”, 13.6.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 145; Letter from Adolf and André to “Komfraktion des Vollzugsbüros der RGI”, 26.10.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 253.

254 Borgersrud, Wollweber-organisasjonen i Norge, pp. 87–90.

255 Schedule of the Principal Revolutionary Organisations Controlled by Moscow (end 1935), 20.4.1936, BNA KV 3/128.

Belgium (Verkest), the Netherlands (Schaap), Spain (Barneto), Italy (Siverio), Denmark (Jensen), Norway (Erikson), Sweden (Rydstedt), Latvia (Avotin), and the USA (Hudson).²⁵⁶

Following orders from Moscow, the ISH Secretariat prepared statements calling for the opening of discussions with the ITF, and for united action from the national unions in Denmark and France in late 1934.²⁵⁷ In November 1934, a confidential circular letter was sent to the leadership of the national sections, calling them to submit proposals for a united front with the ITF.²⁵⁸ In December, the decision was made in Moscow that the ISH Secretariat was to write an open letter to the ITF, to call for a world congress of the ISH and last, but not least, to move the Illegal Secretariat from Rotterdam to France.²⁵⁹

The plans from Moscow and from the comrades at the ISH Secretariat for a “world unified front” together with the ITF never came to fruition. Already in mid-December 1934, the ITF responded negatively to the invitation from the ISH Secretariat.²⁶⁰ The ISH Secretariat – at this time referred to as the Copenhagen Committee as it had not yet moved to Paris – tried in vain to call for a united front in letters and declarations in late 1934 and 1935.²⁶¹

The weak – if not non-existent – position of the ISH was finally revealed during the campaign against the Italian aggression and war against Ethiopia in 1935. While the ISH Secretariat was quick to respond to the call to organise an embargo against Italian ships and even tried to mobilise a world-wide anti-war and “Hands off Abyssinia” campaign, its attempt to enlist the ITF for unified action failed miserably. Initially, the ITF Secretariat did not even bother to respond to the ISH’s calls and, after several futile attempts, the ITF declined any further co-operation with the ISH.²⁶²

256 Letter from Henry to “Komfrak RG1”, 15.6.1935, RGASPI 534/5/242, 188.

257 Vorschläge zur Diskussion über die Aufgaben der ISH, 19.8.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 220–223.

258 Confidential letter to the leading functionaries of the ISH sections, 8.11.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 271–274.

259 Vorschläge der Kommission über die Arbeit der ISH, 2.12.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 293.

260 Letter to the RILU Executive Bureau, 12.12.1934, RGASPI 534/5/241, 300.

261 Deklaration der ISH zur Arbeitsbeschaffungsaktionen der Seeleute und Hafenarbeiter, 23.12.1934; Circular letter [in German] on the need to establish a united front, no date [c:a December 1934], RGASPI 534/5/241, 327; (Draft) Letter to the Secretariat of the ITF, 19.2.1935, RGASPI 534/5/242, 31–32.

262 Letter from Tillon to Comrade Jusofowitch, 11.10.1935 & 12.10.1935, and mimeographed pamphlet: *For the Unity of the Transport Workers in the Struggle Against War – Correspondence between the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (ISH) and the International Transport-Workers’ Federation (ITF) regarding Mussolini’s attack on Abyssinia*, RGASPI

Even more depressing must have been the realisation by the ISH Illegal Secretariat that there was no point in organising a world congress in 1935.²⁶³ Instead, it was decided in Moscow that the Copenhagen Committee was to be reorganised as an opposition group within the ITF ("Oppositionsbewegung innerhalb der ITF").²⁶⁴ However, such plans met stiff criticism among the rank-and-file members of ISH.²⁶⁵ Nevertheless, an enlarged plenum of the ISH Executive Committee convened in Paris in May 1935 to discuss the reorganisation of the ISH.²⁶⁶ It was to be the final organised gathering of the ISH leadership. Interestingly, although the plenum welcomed the idea of amalgamating the ISH with the ITF, the illegal structures of the ISH were not to be affected by the merger.²⁶⁷ Instead, these structures were to be used by Ernst Wollweber to establish his own parallel organisation, the so-called Anti-Fascist League.²⁶⁸

The discussions with the ITF came to nothing. In the mind of the ITF, the ISH had by 1935 outplayed its role, if indeed it ever had any. This was also the conclusion of an internal assessment report on ISH activities written in October 1935. By that time, there no longer existed any sections in Germany, Canada or the USA. The Spanish and Danish unions were about to merge with their respective reformist unions. On the other hand, there was a large opportunity available for activities outside Europe and North America, and the ISH was urged to concentrate on establishing a truly global front by organising regional conferences for the Pacific, Africa and Latin America.²⁶⁹ However, such notions were but chimeras. Since 1933, the former global network was barely functioning. Most of the Interclubs, apart from those in Marseilles, Rouen, Dunkirk, Rotterdam, New York, Copenhagen, Esbjerg and Stockholm, did not exist anymore due to the lack of financial support from the ISH Secretariat.²⁷⁰

534/5/243, 116–118, 173–177. On the "Hands off Abyssinia" Campaign in 1935, see further Chapter 7.

263 Letter from "Georges" to the RILU, 26.3.1935, RGASPI 534/5/242, 94.

264 Protokoll der geschlossenen Sitzung des Sowbüros der ISH, 9.4.1935, RGASPI 534/5/242, 132–135.

265 Eiber, *Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung*, p. 673, 690.

266 Report of the ISH Secretariat to the RILU, 15.6.1935, RGASPI 534/5/241, 188–194.

267 Memorandum über die Arten der internationalen Arbeit unter den Wassertransportarbeitern, 1.9.1935, RGASPI 534/5/243, 83–88.

268 Rajmund Szubanski, *Sabotage Operations of the Prewar Anti-Fascist League* (New York: US Joint Publications Research Service, 1960), available at: <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a335012.pdf> (checked 9.5.2016).

269 Report by NN to "Liebe Freund", 5.10.1935, RGASPI 534/5/243, 112–114.

270 Bericht über die Internationalen Seeleute-Klubs und einige Vorschläge zu ihrer weiteren Tätigkeit, 31.3.1936, RGASPI 534/5/245, 107–117.

The final countdown to the dissolution of the ISH is not even documented. It appears that the ISH Secretariat ceased operations by mid-1936. Adolf Schelley, who had supported the “popular front-tactics”, had been called to Moscow where he was charged for being a “Trotskyist” and a Polish spy and sentenced to death.²⁷¹ Thereafter, the ISH existed only on paper. Its fate was decided by the Secretariat of the Executive Committee of the Comintern in June 1937. At this point had all legal section of the ISH been merge with the ITF. After having discussed a report on the position of the ISH by Comrade Pollano, the Secretariat noted that the ISH at present time no longer had any real organisation left and concluded that it was therefore inadvisable to keep up the ISH. However, it was decided that the liquidation of the ISH was not to be announced to the press. Instead, the ISH Secretariat was to be transformed into an “Bureau for the Support of the Culture and Educational Activities Among Marine Workers”. The idea was that the Interclubs were to be supported by the Bureau. The establishment of new Interclubs in Oran, Algier, Alexandria, Vera Cruz, Sydney, Cape Town, Buenos Aires and Rosario was even projected. Last, but not least, a new weekly bulletin was to be published.²⁷² All in vain. The idea to reinvent the ISH as an information bureau was skipped a few days later and the ISH was liquidated on the 27th June 1937.²⁷³

Postscript: A Radical Trade Union Platform or an Agglomeration of Subversive Cells?

So far, this analysis has highlighted the syndicalist aspect of the short history of the ISH. While the in retrospect romantic description of an agglomeration of subversive cells connecting radicals and communists all over the world does depict one aspect of the ISH, such activities were but a secondary objective of this organisation. One finds few traces of Albert Walter’s clandestine worldwide communications network or of any subversive operations in his or Adolf Schelleys correspondence with the RILU and Comintern headquarters in Moscow. Although this fact certainly does not refute any claims of clandestine activities, it seems that such operations were either not planned in and directed

²⁷¹ Nørgaard, *Revolutionen der udeblev*, p. 137.

²⁷² Internal memorandum by the ECCI Secretariat on work among the seamen, 23.6.1937, RGASPI 495/18/1206, 10, 13–14.

²⁷³ Protokoll (A) Nr 155 zusammengestellt auf Grund fliegender Abstimmung unter Mitgliedern des Sekretariats des EKKI am 27.6.1937, RGASPI 495/18/1206. The ITUCNW was dismantled after a similar discussion in June 1937, see Chapter 7 of this volume.

from Hamburg or were discussed in letters that were addressed to the OMS and the NKVD rather than to the RILU headquarters.

Although the ISH failed in establishing itself as a radical syndicalist platform, the main blame for its disintegration was the Comintern's unclear agenda. Established in opposition to the ITF, its change to the "Popular Front"-policy in 1935, and the idea of merging the RILU with the Amsterdam International, was in effect the deathblow to all of the organisations established during the Third Period.

However, from the perspective of the ISH having established a world-wide communications network, the overall assessment of the ISH is somewhat different. In its heyday during the early 1930s, especially from 1931 to 1933, the ISH was capable of supporting strikes and radical syndicalist activities on a global scale. Although none of these activities were successful in terms of winning a strike or influencing the majority of the maritime workers, the ISH and its sections, rather than the ITF and the reformed syndicalist unions, raised the call for anti-colonial and anti-imperial action, not least their largely forgotten attempts to call for global boycotts and action against the Japanese invasion of Manchuria 1931 and the Italian aggression against Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in 1935. However, many of these activities are little known and further research is needed to establish a detailed account of the global outreach of the ISH during these years.

Although the ISH no longer existed by 1936, some of its ship-cells were still functioning and were used for the transfer of illegal literature, agents and funds. Also, it was by operating via the remnants of the ISH network that Ernst Wollweber was able to establish his sabotage organisation in 1935, termed "Organisation against fascism and in support of the USSR" but usually referred to as the Wollweber League or Wollweber Group. All of the key members of his group were former ISH functionaries. The headquarters of this organisation was in Oslo from where it operated at several European bases, including the still existing Interclubs and other cells in Scandinavia, the Baltic countries, Britain, Belgium and the Netherlands.²⁷⁴ After its first act of sabotage in 1936, the group attracted the attention of the Gestapo. In 1937, the Gestapo believed that Wollweber's group was part of the ISH,²⁷⁵ perhaps due to Richard Krebs' reports...

274 See further Borgersrud, Wollweber-organisasjonen i Norge; Borgersrud, *Die Wollweber-Organisation*.

275 Rudi van Doorslaer, "Anti-Communist Activism in Belgium, 1930–1944", *Socialist Register* 21 (1984), p. 114; Dankaart and Doorslaer, "De activiteiten"; Borgersrud, *Die Wollweber-Organisation*; Verhoyen, "De zaak Block en Celis".

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Global Ambitions, Structural Constraints and Marginality as a Choice: The International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers

Holger Weiss

The political mobilization of colonial subjects and the political history of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism in the African Atlantic world, i.e., North America, Europe, Africa and the Caribbean, is generally analysed within the framework of political Pan-Africanism.¹ Such a narrative highlights the various (positive) articulations of “Blackness” (*positive racialism* according to Kwame Anthony Appiah) and the mobilization of Black activists in the African Atlantic world during the first half of the twentieth century under the banner of the Pan-African movement.² This articulation included, among others, the African Blood Brotherhood and the New Negro Movement (or Harlem Renaissance) of the positive expression of “Blackness” and being “Black” as well as W.E.B. Du Bois’ urge to overcome the “color line” not by the assimilation of African Americans in US White society but by creating room for a “Black Space” by making the African Americans conscious of their own history and their position as political agents and equal citizens.³ Equally important – and during the 1920s more influential – was Marcus Garvey’s “Back to Africa” movement: the radical articulation of Blackness, the call for Black political agency and the demand for a sovereign African continent. Such ideas and aspirations were time and again voiced and debated by African American and Caribbean activists at several national and international congresses and conference during the

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- 1 Andreas Eckert, “Bringing the ‘Black Atlantic’ into Global History: The Project of Pan-Africanism”, in Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier (eds.), *Competing Visions of World Order. Global Moments and Movements, 1880s-1930s* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), pp. 237–258.
 - 2 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father’s House. Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 28–42.
 - 3 On Black radicalism, see further, e.g., Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia. Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (London & New York: Verso 1998), J.A. Zumoff, “The African Blood Brotherhood From Caribbean Nationalism to Communism”, *The Journal of Caribbean Studies* 41:1&2, 2007, pp. 200–226, and Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917–1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

first three decades of the century, such as the four Pan-African Congresses that were held at various intervals from 1900 to 1927.⁴

The narrative of early twentieth century political Pan-Africanism focused on colour and race. The unifying political concept of the twentieth century was in DuBois' mind race and the key argument of political Pan-Africanism was that political as well as societal marginalization, stigmatization and dehumanization of the Black people could only be overcome by collectively combatting racism, segregation and exploitation.⁵

The history of political Pan-Africanism is also presented through its main actors and their organizations: DuBois and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) as well as Garvey and his United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). While DuBois was influenced by Marxism and at times inspired by the Bolshevik revolution, Garvey was rather a radical nationalist. The NAACP was a radical but bourgeois civil rights platform; the UNIA was a Black mass-movement. During the early 1930s, there existed a third organization which usually is listed in the grand narrative of political Pan-Africanism but which – as this presentation argues – does not fit well under the umbrella of positive racialism. This was the International Trade Union of Negro Workers (ITUCNW).⁶

The aim of this chapter is to provide a critical perspective on the ITUCNW as an organization situated in two circuits. Hitherto, the organization and its main activists are largely identified as Black – African American, African Caribbean and African – activists who at a certain stage of their activities either were drawn into the orbit of the Comintern, the Third (Communist) International, or were even members of a Communist party but whose agenda was not the establishment of a Communist world order but the fulfilment of the Pan-African vision of Black liberation in the Atlantic world.⁷ However, such a perspective downplays the crucial role of the second circuit that the ITUCNW was an integral part of, namely the global network of auxiliary and

4 Immanuel Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement: A History of Pan-Africanism in America, Europe and Africa* (New York: Africana Publishing, 1974); Michael O. West/William G. Martin/Fanon Che Wilkins (eds.), *From Toussaint to Tupac. The Black International since the Age of Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

5 W.E.B. DuBois, "The Conservation of Races", *American Negro Academy Occasional Papers*, No 2, 1897; Tunde Adeleke, "Black Americans and Africa: A Critique of the Pan-African and Identity paradigms", *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 31:3 (1998), pp. 505–536.

6 Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement*.

7 See, among others, Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*, and Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919–1939* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2013).

“independent” organizations that had been founded, funded and directed by the Comintern and the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) and its various bureaus and secretariats.⁸ As will be argued, the Pan-Africanist narrative of the ITUCNW has blurred the crucial and at times dominant role of the Comintern and RILU apparatus and its leading functionaries in both monitoring and controlling the activities of the Hamburg Committee or Hamburg Secretariat as the ITUCNW was termed at the RILU headquarters in Moscow. The ITUCNW had been established as an outcome of the “class against class” strategy that were to mark the global strategy of the Comintern and RILU during the “Third Period”. Established in 1930, the ITUCNW was perhaps for a short moment identified as the forthcoming potential Black International but, as will be demonstrated, the Comintern eventually scrapped the idea and designed the organization to become its agitation and propaganda vehicle in the Black Atlantic. The second part of the chapter focuses on the disintegration and liquidation of the ITUCNW as an outcome of the Popular Front strategy and the “Great Terror” in Moscow. In retrospect, the crucial moment of the ITUCNW was not the Nazi take over and the break of the ITUCNW Secretary George Padmore with the Comintern in 1933 but the fateful silence of the Comintern in 1935 during the Abyssinian (Ethiopian) crisis. Whatever sympathy and support the Comintern and the ITUCNW had been able to generate throughout the African Atlantic was lost and paved the way for the resurface of radical political Pan-Africanism. Communist mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa did not root until after 1945 and had little, if any, links to the ITUCNW.

The Narrative of a Radical Pan-Africanist Atlantic

In contrast to the various political Pan-Africanist organizations that were established during the 1920s, such as the UNIA, the Le Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre (CDRN) and its successor, the Ligue de la Défense de la Race Nègre (LDRN) or the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA), the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers was not a “race platform”, i.e., aiming to include and integrate radical nationalists, bourgeois reformists, intellectuals and civil rights activists under the banner of positive racialism.⁹

8 See further Holger Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic: African American Agency, West African Intellectuals and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

9 On Black anti-colonial activism, see Jonathan Derrick, *Africa's "Agitators": Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918–1939* (London: Hurst, 2008).

Instead, the ITUCNW was projected as a class-conscious platform that directed itself to the “Negro toilers” claiming that their struggle was fundamentally a class, not a race issue.¹⁰ Although the ITUCNW depicted the existing Pan-Africanist movements and “Negro” leadership as traitors and positioned itself against them in the early 1930s,¹¹ it is surprising that researchers include the organization in their canon of political Pan-Africanism.¹²

The main reason for perceiving the ITUCNW as a radical Pan-Africanist organization is linked to the retrospective narrative by its main activist George Padmore. Established in 1930, the ITUCNW was soon branded by the British and French governments as yet another mouthpiece of Moscow and the Comintern and, subsequently, the colonial authorities banned its activities and the distribution of its journal, *The Negro Worker*. Until February 1933, the ITUCNW headquarter was located in Hamburg and evolved as the focal point of Padmore’s African Atlantic network. Due to the Nazi takeover in Germany, operations were moved to Paris where Padmore tried to re-establish his network. However, as Padmore also tried to change the political agenda of the organization by establishing links to non-communist Black activists, he was heavily criticized by leading members of the Comintern which eventually led to a rift between him and the communists and his final expulsion from the Comintern in April 1934. Attacking thereafter Stalin for the betrayal of the anticolonial and anti-imperialist cause of the Comintern, he distanced himself from the communists and later evolved as the leading Pan-Africanist agitator and the organizer of the 1945 Manchester Conference.

Perhaps as early as the editorial “Soviet Russia Aids Italy” in the widely-read NAACP mouthpiece *The Crisis* in October 1935 and C.L.R. James’s *World Revolution 1917–1936* (1937), and certainly with Padmore’s influential *Pan-Africanism*

10 Max Barek (ed.), *What is the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers? A Trade Union Programme of Action* (Hamburg: Graphische Industrie Hamburg GmbH, n.d. [ca. 1931]), p. 7; Wilson Record, *The Negro and the Communist Party* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951), p. 84; Reiner Tosstorff, *Profintern. Die Rote Gewerkschaftsinternationale 1920–1937* (Paderborn: Schoenigh, 2004), p. 680.

11 George Padmore, *The Life and Struggle of the Negro Toilers* (London: R.I.L.U. Magazine for the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, 1931), pp. 6, 124.

12 Hakim Adi, “Pan-Africanism and Communism: the Comintern, the ‘Negro Question’ and the First International Conference of Negro Workers”, *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 1:2 (2008), pp. 237–254; Hakim Adi, “The Comintern and Black Workers in Britain and France 1919–37”, *Immigrants & Minorities* 28 (2010), pp. 224–245; Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*; Marc C. Goulding, *Vanguards of the New Africa: Black Radical Networks and Anti-Imperialism in the 1930s*, PhD thesis, New York University, 2012; Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*.

or *Communism?* (1956), the challenge posed by communism and the Comintern to the colonial and imperial system began to be presented critically, if not negatively, by Pan-Africanists. James's account was written from an opportunist or Trotskyist perspective, blaming Stalin and the Bolshevization of the communist movement for the betrayal of a world revolution.¹³ Padmore, on the other hand, argued that the ITUCNW had been a mere cul-de-sac in the political mobilization of Africans and Caribbeans. Still, even in his critical retrospective, the ITUCNW is portrayed as a potential Pan-African platform that had been destroyed by Stalin and his betrayal of the anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist agenda as well as the dogmatism of the Comintern, its "class against class" strategy and the inflexibility of allowing the collaboration with non-communist radical elements along the call for a "United [or Popular] Front" in 1933/1934.¹⁴

Recent research has questioned James' and Padmore's negative account on the impact of communism and the Comintern on the emerging anti-colonial struggle in Africa and the Caribbean. Accounts on radical Black internationalism place the beginning of Black radicalism and its connections to communism among radical African Americans in the USA and the debates of the Comintern in Moscow on the "Negro Question" and the drafting of the various "Negro Theses" during the 1920s.¹⁵ The debate and theses eventually positioned the Comintern and Communism as a radical alternative to bourgeois Pan-Africanism by calling for national self-determination for both the oppressed in the African Diaspora as well as the African colonies. Hakim Adi even argues that the Comintern "can said to have adopted a Pan-Africanist approach to the issue."¹⁶

The above outline of the "radical African Atlantic" puts the focus on the intercultural and transnational formation, on the transcultural and international movement as well as on the hybridity and intermixture of ideas that

13 See further Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, foreword by Robin D.G. Kelley (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

14 James H. Hooker, *Black Revolutionary. George Padmore's Path from Communism to Pan-Africanism* (New York: Praeger 1967); C.L.R. James, "Notes on the life of George Padmore", in Anna Grimshaw (ed.), *The C.L.R. James Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 288–295; Andreas Eckert, "Panafricanismus, afrikanische Intellektuelle und Europa im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert", *Journal of Modern European History* 4 (2006), pp. 235–236. See also Hakim Adi, *West Africans in Britain 1900–1960: Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and Communism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1998); Barbara Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance. Africa and Britain 1919–1945* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

15 See further Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*, Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*.

16 Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, p. xx.

constituted the Black Atlantic. Paul Gilroy highlights in his discussion on the formation processes of the Black Atlantic the “double consciousness” of the main agents, namely the striving of African American intellectuals to be both European and Black, resulting in their desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and political particularity.¹⁷ For them, the anti-colonial and anti-racial language of the Comintern was as initially inspiring and even raised the hopes for the establishment of a separate Colonial or even Black International (see Figure 7.1). According to Brent Hayes Edwards, “Black diasporic radicals” in interwar Harlem, London and Paris, such as George Padmore, Tiemoko Garan Kouyaté and T. Ras Makkonen, strived to establish a Black International or a radical international anti-colonial and anti-racial alliance of peoples of African descent through “uneasy, shifting affiliations” with the Comintern.¹⁸

Radical African Atlantic Connections

Padmore’s 1956 presentation (as well as subsequent discussions) puts the ITUCNW in an African Atlantic context. The organization initially listed as members of its executive board leading African activists, such as E.F. Small from the Gambia, Frank Macaulay from Nigeria, Jomo Kenyatta from Kenya, and Garan Kouyaté from the French Soudan. However, contrary to contemporary assumptions, E.F. Small from the Gambia seems already to have cut his ties with the ITUCNW in 1931 and Padmore was never able to reconnect with him. Frank Macaulay died in October 1931, he was replaced by I.T.A. Wallace-Johnstone. The editorial board of *The Negro Worker*, too, comprised of representatives from the African Atlantic, such as Cyril Briggs and D.B. Amis from the USA, Otto Huiswoud and Charles Alexander from the West Indies, E. Foster Jones from Sierra Leone as well as Albert Nzula and P.G. Moloinyane from South Africa in addition to Small, Kouyaté, Wallace-Johnson and Kenyatta.¹⁹ However, most of the contributing editors never participated (Briggs, Amis, Small) while others never resided in the Caribbean (Huiswoud) or Africa (Kenyatta and Foster Jones were for most of the time in England, Nzula in Moscow,

17 See further Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London & New York: Verso, [1993] 2003).

18 Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 243–244.

19 See, for example, list of contributing editors, *The Negro Worker* 12, December 1931.

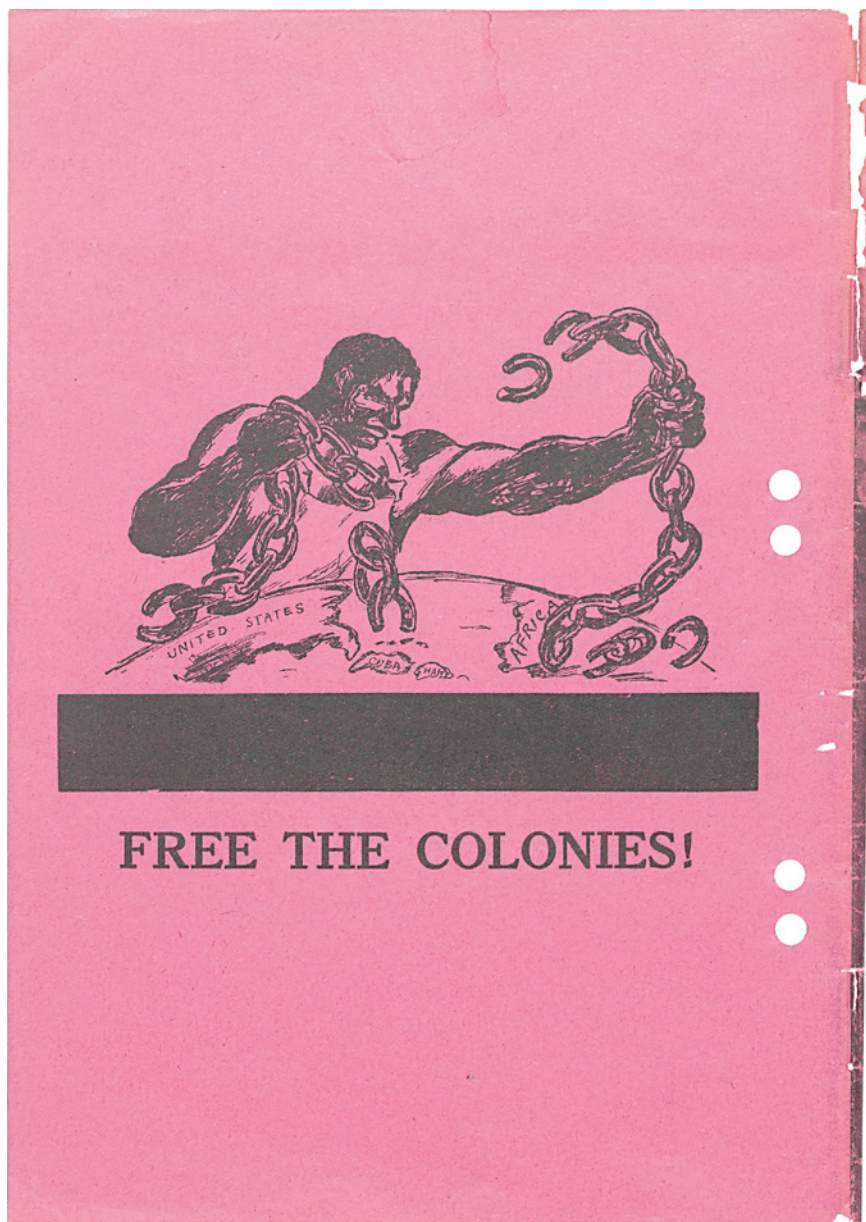


FIGURE 7.1 *The “Negro Toiler Breaking His Chains” and ITUCNW call “Free the colonies”*
SOURCE: BACK COVER OF THE ITUCNW JOURNAL *THE NEGRO WORKER*,
SPECIAL COLONIAL NUMBER, VOL. 1., NO. 10/11 (OCTOBER–NOVEMBER 1931).

Kouyaté in France).²⁰ From his office in Hamburg, Padmore was corresponding with African, African American and African Caribbean activists, such as Wallace-Johnson in Lagos, Benjamin Wuta-Ofei in Accra, and Holle Seleh Tamba in Monrovia. Other African contact persons were Albert Nzula, the South African Communist who died in Moscow in 1934, E. Foster Jones, originally from Sierra Leone but resident in Liverpool, Jomo Kenyatta in London, Garan Kouyaté in Paris and the Cameroonian Joseph Bilé who lived in Berlin. Padmore's Caribbean contacts were mainly with individuals residing on the English-speaking islands such as Jamaica and Trinidad or in England, among others Chris Braithwaite (Jones) and Arnold Ward of the Negro Welfare Association in London, and Harry O'Connell, who was the leader of the West Indian Association in Cardiff. A comparison between his African and Caribbean contacts based on the existing correspondence seems to indicate that at least during the first half of 1932 the majority of his connections were to Africans. In effect, this is also an indication of the ITUCNW's main ambitions while Padmore was in charge of its operations.²¹

Nevertheless, the biggest challenge for Padmore was the virtual absence of any class-conscious radical working class movement, trade union or Communist party in Sub-Saharan Africa (apart from South Africa) and – to a lesser extent – in the Caribbean. While his network almost collapsed in 1933/34, his subsequent activities on the radical Pan-African scene enabled him to reunify his old network: many of those who collaborated with him from 1935 onwards had been part and parcel of his former network, including Kenyatta and Wallace-Johnson. Other leading Pan-Africanists, such as C.L. James and W.E.B. Du Bois, joined his network. Since late autumn 1933, he and his close friend Garan Kouyaté had been planning to call for a Negro World Unity Congress (*Congrès Mondial Nègre*) which was scheduled for 1935 and it is likely that Padmore certainly regarded the project as his version of the “united front” approach. Their call was for a universal organization “destined to direct the future of the Negro movement in all countries”, i.e., a Black International.²² In 1944,

20 Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 552, 561.

21 See further Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, and Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*.

22 Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, pp. 269, 275, 277. The conference was planned to be held in July 1935 in Paris, London or Geneva. For an analysis of Kouyaté's and Padmore's versions of the Manifesto for the conference they wrote in December 1933, see Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, pp. 276–282. What is striking – and not elaborated by Edwards – is Padmore's usage of phrases and expressions he used during his “Bolshevik” period.

Padmore linked up with Kwame Nkrumah and all of his post 1934-associated joined him in Manchester in 1945, as did several others of the future leaders of the African independence movement. What is striking about the 1945 Manchester Conference is that it closely resembled the organizational and structural outline of the 1930 Hamburg Conference which had led to the establishment of the ITUCNW: resolutions being prepared in advance and read out at the conference, committees and bureaus being nominated, communiqués and statements being issued. If the 1945 conference had a Pan-African agenda, its structure was “Bolshevik”.

A Black Unit in the “Solar System” of the Comintern

What Padmore never thoroughly outlined and subsequent researchers hitherto have been unwilling or unable to discuss is the position of the ITUCNW within the “solar system” of the Comintern.²³ Although Hamburg was the focal point of Padmore’s network, the ITUCNW itself was but one of the lesser auxiliary organizations or sub-sections of the Comintern apparatus. Officially independent, the ITUCNW was linked to and its operations were monitored by the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (ISH), the International Red Aid (IRA), the League Against Imperialism (LAI), the Western European Bureau (WEB), the RILU Negro Bureau and, ultimately, the Executive Bureau of the Comintern or ECCI. The ITUCNW had its office in the same building as the ISH, namely at 8, Rothesoodstrasse in Hamburg. Funding was allocated on a monthly basis through the European Bureau of the RILU in Berlin; ultimately, the money was transferred from the RILU headquarters in Moscow. Any operational and strategic decisions by the Secretary of the Hamburg Committee had to be discussed with Albert Walter, the Secretary of the ISH and the comrades in Berlin and Moscow. All political activities and tactics had to follow the guidelines (termed in Comintern vocabulary as *Resolutions*) and instructions

23 The term “solar system” was used by the Finnish Communist Otto Ville Kuusinen to describe the relationship between the various bodies and platforms in the Communist world and the centre in Moscow. See further Heribert Morrison, *The Communist Solar System: The Communist International* (London: Labour Publications Dept., 1933); Bernard S. Morris, “Communist International Front Organizations: Their Nature and Function”, *World Politics* 9:1 (1956), pp. 76–87; John Callaghan, “Storm Over Asia: Comintern Colonial Policy in the Third Period”, in Matthew Worley (ed.), *In Search of Revolution. International Communist Parties in the Third Period* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), p. 36.

that were prepared by the RILU Negro Bureau and approved either by the RILU Secretariat or the ECCI.²⁴

Although the Comintern was to pursue several strategies in relation to African, Caribbean and African-American conditions during the 1920s and early 1930s, all of them were basically variations of the so-called “Negro” Question and the Colonial Question. These two “questions” were until 1928 closely tied together with respect to Africa and the African Diaspora – although the situation on the African continent, apart from South Africa, received sporadic comments at best. After the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern in 1928, the situation was to change and Sub-Saharan Africa (as well as the Caribbean) was to receive more attention from the communists in Moscow. The problem (or challenge), however, for the leading Bolshevik theoreticians was not only the lack of a radical class-conscious working class movement but of a working class at large in Sub-Saharan Africa and, to a lesser extent, in the Caribbean. What they could identify was a “national bourgeoisie” especially in Africa that was criticising the colonial authorities and colonial structures and conditions, and sometimes they even rallied behind radical (bourgeois) movements and organizations.²⁵

Until 1928, Moscow’s strategy was to pursue what was called the “united front” policy, which, among others, manifested itself in the 1927 Brussels Anti-Colonial Congress and the foundation of the League Against Imperialism (LAI).²⁶ At this time, the Comintern and its auxiliary organizations were still trying to establish links to radical bourgeoisie leaders and movements. About one year later, the Comintern scrapped the former policy and turned to the

24 See further Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, p. 292 and Chapters 7.2–7.5. On the ISH, see further Chapter 6 of this volume.

25 Roger E. Kanet, “The Comintern and the „Negro Question“: Communist Policy in the United States and Africa, 1921–1941”, *Survey: A Journal of East & West Studies* 19 (1973), pp. 86–122; Edward T. Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa Before World War II* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1974); Hakim Adi, “The Negro Question: the Communist International and Black Liberation in the Interwar Years”, in: Michael O. West, William G. Martin and Fanon Che Wilkins (eds.), *From Toussaint to Tupac. The Black International since the Age of Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), pp. 155–178.

26 See further Fredrik Petersson, “We Are Neither Visionaries Nor Utopian Dreamers”. *Willi Münzenberg, the League against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925–1933*, vol. I–II (Lewiston: Queenston Press, 2013), Fredrik Petersson, “Hub of the Anti-Imperialist Movement. The League against Imperialism and Berlin, 1927–1933”, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 16:1 (2014), pp. 49–71, as well as Chapter 5 of this volume.

“class against class” and “united front from below” strategies.²⁷ The establishment of the ITUCNW belongs to this new approach, as previous research has also underlined. In addition, the Comintern’s approach towards Africa and the “Negro world” became more differentiated. Whereas the “Negro Question” in the United States became part and parcel of the Comintern’s reading of internal developments in North America and was handled by commissions in Moscow especially concerned with the USA (the Anglo-American Section), the ITUCNW focused on the British colonies and the Anglophone Atlantic world, i.e. the British Caribbean, but excluded South Africa. Connections with French colonial Africa and Francophone Atlantic were established through another organization, the *Ligue de la Defense de la Race Nègre*.²⁸

However, there is a challenge of differentiating between the various units that carried the label “Negro Bureau” at the Comintern and RILU headquarters in Moscow. The division of expertise and tasks further underlines the fact that neither the Comintern nor the RILU was thinking in Pan-African terms in its operational outline. There existed at various times a Negro Sub-Commission, a Negro Commission and a Negro Bureau or Section. Further confusion is added by the fact that both the Eastern Secretariat of the Comintern and the RILU were to establish Negro units. Contemporary authors sometimes regarded these units as being one and the same. Before the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern, reference to a Negro (sub-) Commission was to a special ad hoc group formed to investigate a certain topic or aspect that was discussed at a particular World Congress. Thus, both at the Fourth World Congress in 1922 and at the Fifth World Congress in 1924, special (Negro) Commissions were established to discuss and to prepare resolutions on the “Negro Question”. However, unlike in previous years, the Negro Commission was not dissolved at the end of the Sixth World Congress in 1928, but was transformed into the Negro Bureau of the Eastern Secretariat of the Comintern in December 1928 and was headed by Nikolai Mikhailovich Nasanov and Harry Haywood. About one year later, the Negro Bureau was renamed as the Negro Section. Although the Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat initially tried to monitor all activities

27 See further Matthew Worley (ed.), *In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), and Norman LaPorte, Kevin Morgan and Matthew Worley (eds.), *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: Perspectives on Stalinization, 1917–53* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

28 Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa*, pp. 229–239. On the activities of the *Ligue*, see further P. DeWitte, *Les Mouvements nègres en France 1919–1939* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1985). On the establishment of the ITUCNW and Moscow’s role, see Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 130–133.

concerning “Negro work”, its ambitions soon became limited to influenced the activities of the Communist parties of the USA (CPUSA) and South Africa (CPSA). Between 1929 and 1934–1935, when the structures of the Comintern apparatus in Moscow were reorganized, this unit had no connections with the African Atlantic. The reason for this was simple. No Communist parties existed in Africa south of the Sahara apart from the CPSA (Communist organizations in North Africa were either supervised by the Roman Secretariat or the Anglo-American Secretariat of the Comintern).²⁹

The Negro Section (sometimes referred to as Negro Bureau) of the RILU, on the other hand, was already established in July 1928 and was initially headed by the African American trade union activist James W. Ford. At this point, the unit was sometimes referred to as the Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers.³⁰ For tactical reasons, the RILU and its Negro Section established another organization, called the (provisional) ITUCNW, as a cover organization at the Second World Conference of the League Against Imperialism in Frankfurt am Main in 1929. Officially and in public, this organization – in public referred to as the International Committee of Negro Workers³¹ – was presented as an independent, non-aligned association with its headquarters in New York. In reality, the (provisional) ITUCNW was run as a one-man show by Ford who had been transferred back to the USA. Back in Moscow, the Russian Communist Griorgij Naumovic Slavin and George Padmore were put in charge of the RILU Negro Bureau.³²

The “class against class” strategy affected the composition of the Provisional International Committee. Initially, it consisted of 15 members representing US American, Caribbean, African and European trade unions and political associations, among others William Pickens who represented the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).³³ However, after a fierce attack on Pickens by African American Communists in Moscow during the

29 See further Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, pp. 122–127.

30 Gründung eines internationalen Gewerkschaftskomitees der Neger bei der Roten Gewerkschaftsinternationale, 5.8.1928, RGASPI 458/9/33, 25. The decision to establish the ITUCNW was made by the Executive Committee of the RILU on 31 July 1928. The acronym RGASPI stands for Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RSGAPI), formerly Moscow’s Center for the Preservation of Documents of Modern History (RTsKhIDNI). The RGASPI holds the files of the Comintern Archive.

31 H. Haywood, “Forward to the London Conference of Negro Toilers”, *The Negro Worker* 3:6 (April 1930), p. 3.

32 Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, p. 198.

33 “Call for International Trade Union Conference of Negro Workers”, *The Negro Worker* 2:4 (1929), p. 1.

aftermath of the 1929 World Congress of the League Against Imperialism, the NAACP was removed from the list of organising organisations, and Pickens was expelled as member from the General Council of the League Against Imperialism as well as from the Provisional International Committee. Also, with Ford's re-location to New York, both his ties and the official ties of the Provisional International Committee to the ITUCNW/RILU became blurred. George Padmore, who had replaced Ford in Moscow, became a member of the committee representing the ITUCNW/RILU, whereas Ford represented the Trade Union Unity League – the industrial union umbrella organisation of the Communist Party USA.³⁴

The sole objective of Ford's committee was the organization of the First World Conference of Negro Workers although much of the political planning was conducted in Moscow. After intensive travels of Otto Huiswoud in the Caribbean and William L. Patterson and George Padmore in Europe and, by the latter, to West Africa, as well as the practical assistance of the Western European Bureau, the European Bureau of the Red International Aid, the General Secretariat of the League Against Imperialism, and the International Port Bureau in Hamburg, the conference convened in Hamburg in July 1930. In addition to Ford and Padmore, approximately 17 participants from the USA, the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa, gathered in early July at the premises of the International Seaman's Club at 8, Rothesoodstrasse, close to the Hamburg harbour.³⁵

The World Congress of Negro Workers resulted in the official establishment of the ITUCNW. On the final day of the Hamburg Conference, the delegates nominated a new leadership for the organisation. The composition of the Presidium reflected the ambitions of the delegates to have all parts of the African Atlantic represented. In fact, more than the "African American" bias of the Provisional ITUCNW, the newly-elected body had a definite African focus. Frank Macaulay, E.A. Richards and E.F. Small represented various African countries (Nigeria, Sierra Leone and The Gambia), while Ford represented the USA and M. De Leon Jamaica. In addition, Harry Thuku from Kenya, Albert Nzula from

34 *Report of Proceedings and Decisions of the First International Conference of Negro Workers* (Hamburg: International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers 1930 [Hereafter: ITUCNW, *Report of Proceedings*]), p. 1.

35 The actual number of participants is somewhat mysterious, if not confusing. According to the report Ford had prepared in July 1930, there were 19 delegates and three fraternal delegates. "The international conference of Negro workers", report dated 29.7.1930 (no author), RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 246. Most authors, on the other hand, follow the "official" version of 17 delegates as stated in the published account of the Hamburg Conference.

South Africa, E. Story and Herbert Newton, the latter two from the US South, were elected as honorary members in their absence. Macaulay, Small and Nzula were also nominated to the new Executive Committee in addition to Ford and Padmore. Other members were I. Hawkins and Helen McCain from the USA, Garan Kouyaté from French West Africa but representing the French LDRN, and E. Reid who represented the Jamaican Trades and Labour Unions.³⁶

With the establishment of the ITUCNW, the RILU unit in Moscow was renamed as the Negro Bureau of the RILU.³⁷ Officially, the ITUCNW was to be “a class organization, organizing and leading the fight in the interest of Negro workers in Africa, the West Indies and other colonies”.³⁸ In its first pamphlets and publications, all of which had been written by members of the RILU Negro Bureau, such as George Padmore’s *Life and Struggle of the Negro Toilers* (1931), the class-aspect was highlighted and it was underlined that race was not the guideline of the organization. Instead, its objective was to address and organize the workers in the African Atlantic. The connections to the RILU Negro Bureau were initially denied but as early as 1931, Padmore had to admit that the RILU had in fact established the ITUCNW.³⁹

From 1929, then, the RILU’s “Negro work” was manifested through a dual but asymmetrical hierarchy and structure. At the top was the RILU Negro Bureau in Moscow, which was in charge of tactical and strategic operational planning. It was also the supervision unit, led until October 1931 by Slavin and Padmore and thereafter by Otto Huiswoud and Alexander Zusmanovich. However, a thorough reorganization of the Comintern and RILU between 1933 and 1936 further changed the operational structures of Negro work in Moscow. By July 1933, a plan had been launched to totally reorganise the RILU. Among other things, the RILU Negro Bureau was to be liquidated and its activities to be merged with the Negro Commission of the Eastern Secretariat. On 9 January 1934, Zusmanovich started as Referent for Africa and Deputy Chair of the new ECCI Negro Bureau while Huiswoud took over the operations of the ITUCNW. In 1935, the ECCI once again modified its apparatus, resulting in the liquidation

36 ITUCNW, *Report of Proceedings*, p. 3, 40. Interestingly, a different list of the members of the ITUCNW Executive Committee was being circulated in October 1930: Jenny Reid instead of Helen McCain, G. Ried instead of E. Ried, George Small instead of E.F. Small, Tom Marsh instead of Frank Macaulay, M. Kouyaté instead of G. Kouyaté. See further “Election of Executive Committee”, *The Negro Worker* 3 – Special Number: The Hamburg Conference (October 1930), p. 16.

37 (30/VIII/30.) Resolution on Negro Work, RGASPI 495/18/810, fol. 72–76.

38 “What is the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers?”, *The Negro Worker* 1:10/11 (1931), 45.

39 Padmore, *Life and Struggle*, p. 123.

of its Negro Bureau in October 1935. Zusmanovich was dismissed from his positions. Instead, matters concerning Negro work were mainly to be handled by the Secretariat of André Marty. The final dismantling of the RILU followed in 1936. By this point the Comintern apparatus had little remaining interest in supervising "Negro work".⁴⁰

On the other hand, the Hamburg Committee was the operating and executive unit led by James W. Ford (until October 1931), and thereafter by George Padmore (until the autumn of 1933). After Padmore was expelled from Germany in February 1933, the ITUCNW at first operated from Paris (until early 1934), thereafter – illegally – in Antwerp in 1934 and ("semi-legally") in Amsterdam in 1935. In February 1934 Otto Huiswoud had taken over as Secretary. The headquarters were transferred back to Paris in 1936, where Huiswoud tried in vain to re-establish the Committee's activities.⁴¹

Throughout its existence, the Hamburg Committee was to be closely linked to the Secretariat of the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (see Figure 7.2).⁴² This was most evident when Ford resided in Hamburg when the ISH Secretary Albert Walter regarded the Hamburg Committee as the colonial section of the ISH. During Padmore's sojourn, the two organizations were officially separated but still operated from the same premises, namely the ISH headquarters at 8, Rothesoodstrasse. On the other hand, both organizations were controlled by the RILU European Bureau in Berlin, headed by Leow Smolianski alias Comrade Pechmann and Max Ziese. The direct links between the ITUCNW and the ISH were cut due to the Nazi takeover in Germany and the transfer of the ISH headquarters to Copenhagen although by 1934, Luigi Polano alias Henry Maurice of so-called Illegal Secretariat of the ISH became Huiswoud's liaison officer. Both Huiswoud and Comrade Maurice operated at this point from Antwerp.⁴³ In 1935, the Interclub in Rotterdam supported Huiswoud's activities and his final transfer to Paris had been proposed by the ISH as part of a grand plan to strengthen the colonial work by making use of ISH connections.⁴⁴

To make things more complicated still, the Negro Section of the Comintern served as a kind of superstructure, because members of the RILU Negro Bureau were also members of the CI/Eastern Secretariat Negro Bureau. However,

40 See further Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*.

41 Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*.

42 On the ISH, see Chapter 6 of this volume.

43 Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, Chapter 7.3. and pp. 623–624.

44 Letter from André and Georges to Komfraktion der RGI, 12.4.1935, RGASPI 534/5/242, fol. 121.



FIGURE 7.2 *"International solidarity with Negro Workers, 100,000 workers demonstrating at Hamburg, Germany, for international solidarity and against imperialism in Africa"*
 PHOTOGRAPH PUBLISHED IN: *THE NEGRO WORKER*, SPECIAL COLONIAL
 NUMBER, VOL. 1, NO. 10/11, OCTOBER-NOVEMBER [1931], P. 32.

the ultimate governing body was not either of the two Negro Bureaus but the Executive Committee of the Comintern and the Political Secretariat of the Comintern. Although operational, strategic and political planning concerning work in the African Atlantic was confirmed to the RILU Negro Bureau, all major decisions had to be approved by the ECCI and its various bodies.

A Black International or Not?

The initial composition of the leadership of the ITUCNW reflected Ford's and Padmore's ambition to establish a collective platform embracing all parts of the African Atlantic: Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas. Their ambition was to develop the ITUCNW into a Black International as Padmore had envisioned in 1930:

[The Conference] will be the first time that the broad toiling masses of Negroes in the United States, Africa, the West Indies and Latin America, will come together and organise into a powerful International Movement,

on the basis of a genuine revolutionary program in order to carry on the struggle more effectively for the liberation of the brutally oppressed Negro race from the fetters of white capitalist-imperialist domination.⁴⁵

Although this plan might reflect a Pan-Africanist vision, the agenda and objectives of the organisation had an exclusive class-based rather than an inclusive race-based character: it was to be an organisation only for the Black toilers, not for the Black bourgeois.⁴⁶ The latter were heavily criticised by Padmore for betraying the cause of the “Negro toilers” and time and again he issued a full broadside against them in his writings. “The Negro petty-bourgeois politicians and national reformist “leaders” are [sic] today taken an more and more active part in betraying the struggles of Negro workers and peasants than ever before,” he declared in one of his pamphlets, and continued that

[...] During the last war the so-called Negro leaders like Du Bois [...], together with other “uncle Tom” Negro politicians, newspaper editors and preachers appealed to the toiler of their race to help the capitalists, and the bankers and the landlords to win the war. [...] Marcus Garvey, the Negro national reformist leader has also sold out the struggle of his oppressed people, and has brazenly announced his intention to go over to the side of the British imperialists. [...] Therefore, it is the duty of every honest Negro worker to denounce Garvey and the other bourgeois nationalist leaders and break away from their influence, which means the continuation of lynching, segregation, forced labour, slavery, low wages, long hours, unemployment, etc.⁴⁷

Slogans and statements published by the ITUCNW/RILU echoed that of the Third Period, such as “Long live the United Front of the workers and peasants of all nationalities and races! Down with Robbers and Bloody Imperialists! For a relentless struggle against all exploiters and oppressors!” or “Down With the

45 George Padmore, “The Negro Liberation Movement and the International Conference”, *The Negro Worker* 3:1–2 (January–February 1930), p. 7.

46 “What is the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers?”, *The Negro Worker* 1:10–11 (October–November 1931), p. 45. Also [Max Barek, ed.,] *What is the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers? A Trade Union Programme of Action* (Hamburg: Graphische Industrie Hamburg GmbH, n.d. [ca. 1931]).

47 G. Padmore, *Negro Workers and the Imperialist War. Intervention in the Soviet Union* (Hamburg: International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, 1931), pp. 13–15.

Social-Fascists and Reformists from the Second and Amsterdam Internationals, Lackeys of Capitalism and Traitors of the Working Class".⁴⁸

Padmore expressed a radical and militant version of the official "class against class" strategy of the Comintern also in the ITUCNW mouthpiece, *The Negro Worker*. For example, in August 1931 the signature G.P., i.e., George Padmore, vehemently attacked Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association. Accusing Black politicians inside and outside the Garvey Movement as traitors to "the oppressed millions of their race", he announced that the freedom of the oppressed Black workers in the African Atlantic "can only be done by striving for the unity of workers of all colours and all oppressed peoples on the basis of the programme of militant class struggle, represented by the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers".⁴⁹ In the first number of *The Negro Worker* edited by Padmore in Hamburg, the readers were reminded that "Exploitation knows no colour-line. A capitalist and landlord is the same bloodsucker, no matter what colour he might be".⁵⁰

The "class against class" strategy laid out the guidelines of both the ITUCNW and of its predecessor: it was never to link up with Pan-Africanism or even to emerge as a Black International. Its objective was to "develop a spirit of international solidarity among the Negro workers in their common struggle with the workers of other races and countries against world imperialism"; its task had been to "direct and stimulate the activities of the revolutionary trade unions in organising Negro workers into the trade union movement [as well as] to promote the revolutionary trade union movement in Africa and West Indies".⁵¹ Last but not least, its mission was to "combat Negro bourgeois nationalism"⁵² as well as "social-reformism and the reformist programmes of the Negro capitalist misleaders, like Marcus Garvey, Du Bois, Pickens and Walter White of the National Association of Colored People in America, Kadalie and Champion in South Africa, Captain Cipriani in the West Indies [...]".⁵³

48 Slogans printed in *The Negro Worker* 3:9 (June 1930) as well as used in "Appeals of the Executive Committee of the Conference to Negro Toilers & all oppressed Peoples of the World", *The Negro Worker* 3 – Special Number: The Hamburg Conference (1930), p. 1.

49 "Editor's Note", *The Negro Worker* 1:8 (August 1931), p. 9.

50 "War in the East: Negro Workers, defend the Soviet Union and the Chinese Revolution!", *The Negro Worker* 1:10–11 (October–November 1931), p. 3.

51 "Statement to our readers", *The Negro Worker*, Special Issue on the Fifth Congress of the RILU (November 1930), p. 1.

52 "Statement to our readers", *The Negro Worker*, Special Issue on the Fifth Congress of the RILU (November 1930), p. 1.

53 "What is the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers?", *The Negro Worker* 1:10–11 (October–November 1931), p. 45.

Moscow and the Objectives of the ITUCNW

The position of the ITUCNW as an “independent” class organization was debated at length in Moscow during 1931. At first, the Hamburg Committee’s link to the RILU apparatus were to be camouflaged and the organization was to present itself as a radical platform for “organizations of Negro workers” in Africa, North and Latin America and the Caribbean.⁵⁴ On the other hand, the RILU Negro Bureau was to cooperate with the American, English, French, Belgian, Latin-American and South American sections of the RILU so that the workers in the African and Caribbean colonies could organize themselves.⁵⁵ A similar position was projected by the Negro Committee of the Eastern Secretariat. In their vision, the ITUCNW was to become the rallying force of all parts of the African Atlantic, including the USA and South Africa. In addition, the ITUCNW was to be a vehicle for Soviet foreign policy and a tool for the popularisation of the social and economic policy of the USSR.⁵⁶

In contrast to the above two broad perspectives on the global duties of the ITUCNW, the RILU Secretariat envisioned a much more limited role and character of the organization. First, the Hamburg Committee was to work in much closer cooperation with the various RILU sections than the Eastern Secretariat had projected. Second, and more important, the range of activities and duties were to be much more limited, focussing only on Africa and the Caribbean. Therefore, two perspectives collided in Moscow, that of the “Negro Question” and that of the “Colonial Question”. The RILU Secretariat’s critique about the vision of a Black International was formulated in two memoranda, the first in June 1931 and the second in late September 1931.⁵⁷ Both texts underlined the hierarchical relationship between Hamburg and Moscow. The September Memorandum, especially, clearly stated that the Hamburg Committee was an organization that first and foremost belonged to the labour union or syndicalist sphere of activities of Moscow, not that of parties or other organizations. Neither was it to be developed into an independent body but the activities in

54 Resolution of the Organisation and Functions of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, 24.1.1931, RGASPI 495/155/96, 10–11. Hereafter: ITUCNW January 1931 Resolution.

55 Padmore, Plan of work of the Negro Bureau of the RILU for the first quarter beginning October 1 to December 31, 1930, RGASPI 534/1/164, 4–5.

56 ITUCNW January 1931 Resolution, RGASPI 495/155/96, 11–12.

57 Concrete proposals on Report of Work of Hamburg Committee, filed as 52/52.129.5.WWC, dated 10.6.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, 25–27; Secretariat of the RILU, Negro Workers’ TU Committee of the RILU, Concrete Proposals on Report of Work of Hamburg Committee, filed as 52/52.141.sec.3, dated 30.9.1931, RGASPI 534/3/615, 123–124.

Hamburg were to be controlled by the ISH and by the European Secretariat of the RILU in Berlin.

The various suggestions for reorganisation of “Negro work” prompted the ECCI to revise the organisational structures of the Eastern Secretariat and to change the political character of the ITUCNW. On the 7th of October 1931, the Political Commission of the ECCI (PolCom) decided to overhaul the setup of the Eastern Secretariat.⁵⁸ One day later, on the 8th of October 1931, the RILU Secretariat in its turn decided that any association, group or labour union of Negro workers in Africa or the Caribbean that was not a member of either the Amsterdam International or the RILU were invited to join the Hamburg Committee as full members. The idea was to pave the way for the development of radical workers organisations in the African Atlantic and, consequently, turning the ITUCNW into a Black International. This plan in turn was attacked by leading members of the Eastern Secretariat who claimed the RILU Secretariat’s decision to be a dangerous deviation of the official “class against class” strategy.⁵⁹

On the 13th of October 1931, the PolCom made the final decision about the character and objectives of the ITUCNW. The PolCom intervened in the debate between the Eastern Secretariat and the RILU about the necessity to develop the ITUCNW into a Black International and rejected the project. Instead, the ITUCNW was to concentrate on activating “Negro” workers in the African colonies and in the Caribbean. Local “Negro” organizations, the PolCom stated, were to link up with the European Secretariat of the RILU, the LAI, the Latin American Trade Union Federation, and the Pacific Secretariat. Only those “Negro” organizations that could not establish contacts with the units listed above were to be connected with the Hamburg Committee. However, each affiliation of a particular “Negro” organization with the ITUCNW was to be decided by the Executive Committee of the RILU.⁶⁰

The PolCom ruling definitively changed the outlines of the ITUCNW. Although the ITUCNW, to some extent, had tried to establish itself as the focal point of the radical African Atlantic during its first year of existence, its outreach became limited to Africa and the Caribbean by the end of 1931. For the

58 Protokoll Nr. 186 der Sitzung der Politischen Kommission des Pol.Sekr. des EKKI, 7.10.1931, RGASPI 495/4/144, 2, 5.

59 Letter (German translation) from G. Safarov to the Political Commission, 11.10.1931, RGASPI 495/4/145, 30.

60 Protokoll Nr 187 der Sitzung der Politischen Kommission des Pol.Sekr am 13.10.1931, §3 Meinungsverschiedenheiten zwischen dem Ost-LS des EKKI und der Profintern betr. den Charakter des Hamburger Komitees der Negerarbeiter, RGASPI 495/4/145, 1–2.

rest of its existence, the ITUCNW was to focus on the Colonial Question and as a consequence excluded direct political activities in the USA and in South Africa.

Brothers in Arms? The ITUCNW and the ISH

The ITUCNW's key partner in Hamburg was the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (ISH, officially established in October 1930).⁶¹ The intimate structural connections between the ISH and the Hamburg Committee were part and parcel of the grand strategy designed in Moscow. The office of the Hamburg Committee was located in the building of the ISH headquarters. The ISH Secretariat and the local International Seamen's Club were to be assisted by the Hamburg Committee in their "special work" among African and African-Caribbean seamen.⁶² In terms of planning for activities concerning the African Atlantic, the ISH, the Hamburg Committee and the RILU Negro Bureau were to co-operate.⁶³ Both organisations received funding from Moscow via the same relay station in Berlin, namely the European Bureau of the RILU. Monthly payments were transferred from the Comintern to Berlin and then on to the ISH account in Hamburg; the activities and the salaries of the personnel of the Hamburg Committee were paid from the ISH account. The transfer of funds from Moscow to Germany neatly reveals the positions of the various organisations in the solar system of the Comintern: on top the Comintern centre in Moscow, next the RILU Secretariat, then the RILU European Bureau, then the ISH and the Hamburg Committee.

In practice, however, the realisation and fulfilment of the planned co-operation proved to be far more difficult. During Ford's period as Secretary of the Hamburg Committee, the leadership of the ISH regarded the ITUCNW merely as a branch of the ISH rather than an independent organisation. In fact, the readers of *The Negro Worker* were informed in July 1931 that the planned demonstration on August First was the International Day of Struggle Against Imperialist War. That year its focus was on "the Negro workers and especially sea workers", highlighting that "international capital and the ship-owners" were stirring up White, Black, and colonial seamen against each other backed by the reformed trade union leaders of the International Transport Federation.

61 See further Chapter 6 of this volume.

62 Duties and Tasks of [ISH] Secretariat Members, (undated) directives issued in Moscow, filed 17.3.1931, RGASPI 534/5/220, 128–129.

63 Letter from Padmore to Walter, 21.7.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, 96.

Therefore, “[t]he 1st of August campaign must be utilized with a view of organizationally strengthening the I.S.H. (International of Seamen and Harbour workers) among the colonial seamen, the recruiting of new members from among the colonial seamen must be in the forefront of our work of mobilizing these seamen against war preparations and for the fight to better their living conditions and for the defense of the Soviet Union”.⁶⁴ At the following mass demonstrations, banners urging “Negro seamen” to join the ISH were carried through the streets of Hamburg (see Figure 7.3.).

When Padmore took over, the relationship between these two organisations became more balanced, although the Hamburg Committee was still expected to assist the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers in its agitation and propaganda work among seamen. The relationship was a limited one as Padmore regarded work among Black seamen in European ports to be done in the name of the ITUCNW, an idea that was opposed by Albert Walter, the Secretary of the ISH who claimed that work among seamen was aimed to strengthen the national sections of the ISH, not to establish sub-committees of the ITUCNW. The case of Garan Kouyaté’s work in Marseille was illuminating: Ford and Padmore claimed that he was in charge of the ITUCNW sub-committee in Marseille



FIGURE 7.3 “Comrade Foster Jones, leader of African Seamen, greeting a meeting of German Workers in Hamburg”

PHOTOMONTAGE PUBLISHED IN *THE NEGRO WORKER*, SPECIAL COLONIAL NUMBER, VOL. 1, NO. 10/11 (OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 1931), P. 43.

64 “August First and Negro Workers”, *The Negro Worker* 1:7 (1931), pp. 4–6.

and had the task of working among Black seamen and harbour workers in the port. On the other hand, Kouyaté had been charged by the national section of the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers in France to organise its work in Marseille.⁶⁵

However, the relationship between the Hamburg Committee and the ISH were often constrained when it came to work among coloured seamen in Britain and France as Christian Høgsbjerg and David Featherstone have critically highlighted and has also been pointed out in Chapter 6. Time and again, Padmore had to remind the leading officials in the Seamen's Minority Movement, the British section of the ISH, to direct their attention to the plight of coloured seamen and to render assistance to Harry O'Connell in Cardiff and Chris Jones in London.⁶⁶

Consequently, both Ford and Padmore had multiple responsibilities while they were operating in Hamburg. Ford was in charge of the Hamburg Committee and officially represented the ITUCNW. At the same time, he was a member of the Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism as well as working for the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers. For example, he participated at the International Conference on African Children in Geneva in May 1931 as the representative of both the League and the ITUCNW.⁶⁷ The following day he delivered a speech as the representative of the ITUCNW at a Scottsboro Campaign rally arranged by the Swiss section of the International Red Aid.⁶⁸ When George Padmore took over in Hamburg, he also became engaged in both the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers and the League Against Imperialism. In similar ways, Garan Kouyaté was associated with the ITUCNW, the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers and the League Against Imperialism.

65 See further Weiss, *Framing a Radical Atlantic*, Chapter 7.3.

66 See further Christian Høgsbjerg, "Mariner, Renegade and Castaway: Chris Braithwaite, Seamen's Organiser and Pan-Africanist", *Race & Class* 53:2 (2011), pp. 36–57; David Featherstone, "Harry O'Connell, Maritime Labour and the Racialised Politics of Place", *Race & Class* 57:3 (2016), pp. 71–87.

67 The Conference was organized by Save the Children International Union. See further Dominique Marshall, "Children's Rights in Imperial Political Cultures: Missionary and Humanitarian Contributions to the Conference on the African Child of 1931", *International Journal of Children's Rights* 12 (2004), pp. 273–318.

68 "Increase and Spread the Scottsboro Defense", *The Negro Worker* 1:7 (July 1931), pp. 3–4; J.W. Ford, "The International Conference on African Children", *The Negro Worker* 1:7 (July 1931), pp. 8–10.

The ITUCNW in the African Atlantic

The ITUCNW's aim was to sensitise the working class in the African Atlantic. The RILU Secretary, Alexander Losovsky, stressed in 1931 that "there is no colony where there are no wage workers. This means that the question of the formation of trade unions is now ripe for all countries", and pointed out that such conditions prevailed at least in the Gambia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, Nigeria, the Belgian Congo, Kenya, Guadeloupe and Martinique.⁶⁹ The main tool for agitation and propaganda was *The Negro Worker*, the mouthpiece of the ITUCNW. Established in 1928 as the bulletin of the International Negro Workers' Information Bureau in Moscow, i.e. the International Trade Union Committee of the RILU, this journal appeared as *The International Negro Workers' Review* published by the ITUCNW in Hamburg in January 1931. However, already in March 1931, the journal was again published as *The Negro Worker*. Ford's and Padmore's ambition was to establish *The Negro Worker* as a mass publication. Each of the first eight issues of *The Negro Worker* was printed in one thousand copies.⁷⁰ In early 1932, Padmore decided to distribute the journal for free in order to speed up its distribution. The campaign was successful, the circulation steadily increased, and had reached 5,000 copies per issue by the end of 1932.⁷¹ However, decisions made in Moscow to cut the funding to the various units of the Comintern and RILU that had been relocated from Germany after the Nazi takeover in 1933 also affected the circulation of *The Negro Worker*. When Huiswoud took over as editor-in-chief in March 1934, he had to reduce the circulation of the journal to 2,000 copies as an attempt to cut down costs.⁷²

The Negro Worker, as well as the pamphlets published by the ITUCNW, were disseminated in two ways in the African Atlantic. It was sent by postal services to countries where Communist activities had not been banned by the authorities, such as the USA or the United Kingdom. In the Caribbean and African colonies, however, the colonial authorities had banned subversive and anti-colonial activities, including Communist agitation and propaganda. Therefore, the journal was smuggled into these countries by making use of the ISH's courier system, namely its covert network through the ship cells that had been

69 A. Losovsky, "A.B.C. of Trade Unionism for Negro Workers (Preface)", *The Negro Worker* 1:7 (July 1931), p. 12.

70 (Ford,) ITUCNW Report 1930–1931, RGASPI 534/3/669, 224.

71 (Padmore,) ITUCNW Report 1931–1932, RGASPI 534/3/753, 125.

72 Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, p. 633.

established on German, British and other vessels which were docking at ports in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific oceans.⁷³

The publications of the Hamburg Committee were all written in English and thus limited to the Anglophone African Atlantic. Initially, *The Negro Worker* was also to be translated into French and was published as *L'Ouvrier Nègre*. However, due to lack of funding, this project was shelved in May 1932. Instead, Garan Kouyaté's journal, the *Cri des Nègres*, was to be developed into the French mouthpiece of the ITUCNW. This journal was to be regularly supplied with articles in French translation as well as pictures from *The Negro Worker*. In return, Kouyaté was to send pictures and material that could be used in *The Negro Worker*.⁷⁴ Plans for a Brazilian (Portuguese) edition of the journal never materialised.

While it is evident that *The Negro Worker* achieved its distribution goal, a totally different question is whether it emerged as a voice of the African working class and downtrodden during its existence. At least when published by the Hamburg Committee, *The Negro Worker* was able to articulate voices from Africa and the African Diaspora.⁷⁵ However, the voices of the RILU Negro Bureau were also being heard: Padmore (as long as he was in charge in Moscow), Otto Huiswoud, who replaced Padmore, and Alexander Zusmanovich, who had replaced Slavin in 1931. Throughout its existence, the guidelines for the contents of *The Negro Worker* were decided by the RILU Negro Bureau in Moscow rather than by the journal's editor-in-chief. Both Ford, Padmore and Huiswoud received articles written by comrades in Moscow that were to be published in the journal. Some issues, for example those in 1935, were written in total in Moscow.⁷⁶

Containing articles about the plight, hardship and suffering of Africans in the Atlantic world, the outspoken aim of the editors was to establish *The Negro Worker* as the leading radical political Black magazine of its time. In Brent Hayes Edwards' view, the journal emerged as the key channel for Padmore's radical Pan-African vision; in his mind it was Padmore's determination to make *The Negro Worker* a space for the "points of view" and "daily life" of workers of African descent, rather than a place for the Communist hierarchy to debate the

73 See further Weiss, *Framing a Radical Atlantic*, Chapter 8.5.

74 Practical Decisions on the Discussion of the Int. Tr. Un. Comm., 23-26.5.32, RGASPI 534/3/753, 112.

75 This is highlighted in Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*.

76 Letter from Zus[manovich] to Otto [Huiswoud], 21.2.1935, RGASPI 495/155/102, 2. See further Weiss, *Framing a Radical Atlantic*, pp. 562–563, 633–641.

“Negro Question”.⁷⁷ However, critical scholars, such as Edward T. Wilson, highlight the influence and authority of Moscow and refer to Rolf Italiaander’s interview with Ivan Izosimovich Potekhin who argued that much of the editorial work was actually done by the RILU Negro Bureau: “We determined its direction from Moscow”.⁷⁸ However, in his final assessment of the journal, Wilson is rather impressed despite his critical presentation of the journal. It was the first journal of its kind ever to circulate among Africans and although the British colonial authorities tried their best in prohibiting its circulation in Africa, *The Negro Worker* was able to boost a readership. Most importantly, Wilson even regards the journal to have made an impact in radicalizing indigenous political attitudes in Africa: “Through the Negro Worker’s polemics, moreover, the more educated strata of the African population were encouraged – some perhaps for the first time – to promote the cause of colonial independence”.⁷⁹

Nevertheless, *The Negro Worker* was not a mouthpiece for a projected radical or even militant Black mass organisation or “International”. On the contrary, a close reading of its contents even during the heydays of Padmore’s editorship in 1932 reveals that the journal never called for the establishment of Black or African radical political units, be they parties or labour unions. Perhaps Padmore had been criticized by Albert Walter for presenting the ITUCNW as the spearhead of Black seamen in the October–November 1931 issue of *The Negro Worker*. Be as it may, five months later, the April 1932 issue of the journal held as its front cover a photomontage depicting a class-conscious message to the reader: A White, a Black and a Yellow worker (i.e., seaman) pointed united towards the catchword “Strike!”, standing in front of a red flag carrying the badge of the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (see Figure 7.4). An “Appeal to the Negro Seamen and Dockers” published by the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers in the journal further urged the Black seamen “to join ship and dock committees of the International Seamen and Harbour Workers Union which are fighting for the [...] demands of the Negro seamen and the sailors of other races and colours”.⁸⁰

Rather than emerging as a radical mass organisation, the Hamburg Committee established itself mainly as a centre or node of a communication network. Had it been projected as an organisation, the ITUCNW would have carried its

77 Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, p. 257.

78 Edward T. Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa Before World War II* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1974), p. 214; Rolf Italiaander, *Schwarze Haut im roten Griff* (Düsseldorf: Econ-Verlag, 1962), p. 74.

79 Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa*, pp. 214–216.

80 “Appeal to the Negro Seamen and Dockers”, *The Negro Worker* 2:4 (April 1932), p. 24.

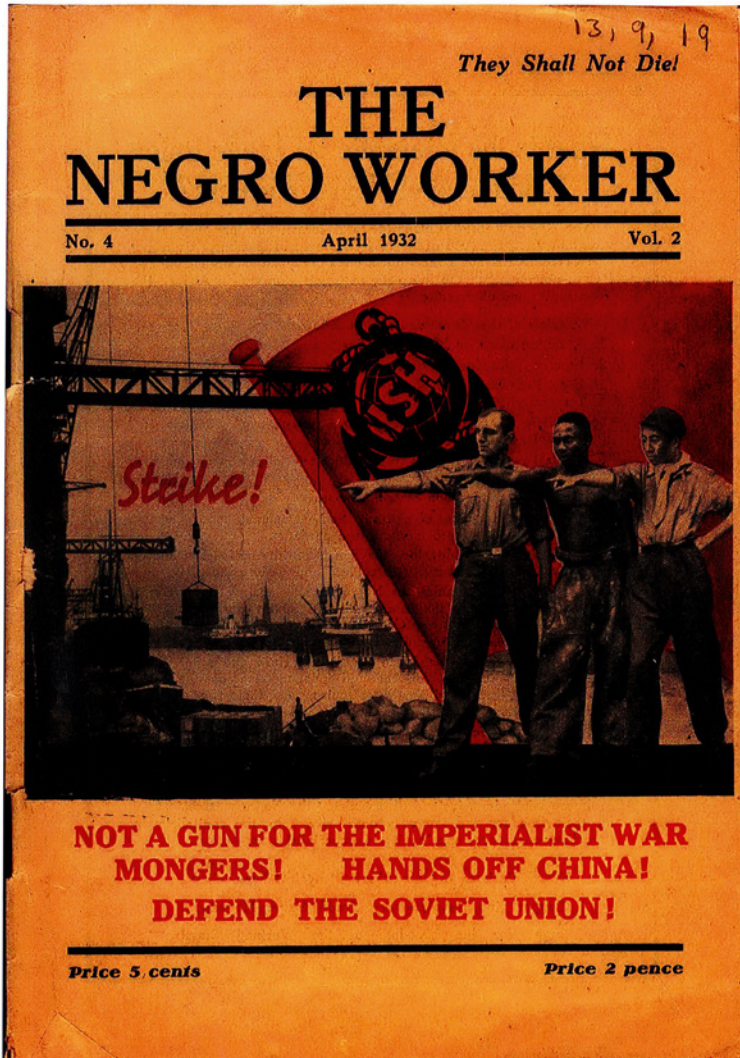


FIGURE 7.4 Cover of *The Negro Worker*, April 1932

SOURCE: *THE NEGRO WORKER* 4:2 (APRIL 1932).

own logo similar to the other Comintern or RILU units. In February 1931 Padmore instructed Ford that whatever the publication and whenever published, the idea of a radical African Atlantic, if not a Black International, was to be reproduced in the form of a unified graphical message: an image showing a male Black worker breaking his chains and unifying the African and American continents. The idea was simple but effective, Padmore assured Ford: "This will

help to establish a certain familiarity among the workers for our literature and at the same time convey the idea that only the workers themselves can break their chains.”⁸¹ However, this logo was not unique to the Hamburg Committee. As Minkah Makalani has pointed out, exactly the same logo had already been used by the American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC),⁸² and had already appeared on the covers of *The Negro Worker* from 1928 to 1930. In 1929, the logo was also used by the German Youth Section of the LAI in at least one of its leaflets;⁸³ in 1930, the logo covered the masthead of *Der koloniale Freiheitskampf*, the journal of the German Section of the LAI.⁸⁴ In 1933, the logo also appeared on a publication of the League of Struggle for Negro Rights (LSNR), the successor to the ANLC in the USA.⁸⁵

The original ANLC/ITUCNW/LSNR logo articulates a rather limited vision of the radical Atlantic. Firstly, it was a gendered message: a Black male worker. Secondly, only the northern half of the Atlantic Rim is depicted, excluding Brazil and the southern parts of Africa. Thirdly, the Black worker arises from America, directing his efforts towards the Caribbean and Africa.

The Ethiopian Crisis and the Silence in Moscow

Most researchers claim that George Padmore's rift with the Comintern in 1933 and his expulsion in 1934 resulted in the collapse of the African and Caribbean networks the ITUCNW had been able to establish by that date. This was certainly true in some cases, for example with regard to Jomo Kenyatta, I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, Joseph Bilé, Garan Kouyaté, Harry O'Connell and Chris Braithwaite, who in 1933/34 had become personae non grata in the eyes of the Comintern. On the other hand, Otto Huiswoud orchestrated rather successfully a negative campaign against Padmore and Kouyaté in 1934, and at least Arnold Ward, Secretary of the London-based Negro Welfare Association, remained within the ITUCNW-camp until mid-1935. Huiswoud was also able to (re-)establish a close network including trade union activists in both the British and the Dutch Caribbean. In fact, the demise of the ITUCNW network

81 Letter from Padmore to Ford, 25.2.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, 58.

82 Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*, p. 165.

83 See https://www.abo.fi/sitebuilder/media/7957/picgallery_9.jpg.

84 See front page of *Der koloniale Freiheitskampf* (Organ der deutschen Sektion der Liga gegen Imperialismus) 1.2.1930.

85 *Equality, Land and Freedom. A Program for Negro Liberation* (New York: League of Struggle for Negro Rights, 1933).

occurred during the latter part of 1935 and was to a large extent the result of the incapability and inactivity of the Comintern to back Huiswoud's attempt to establish the ITUCNW as the spearhead in the campaign against Italian aggression against Ethiopia.⁸⁶

However, to the big surprise of Huiswoud, the Comintern was passive in the Ethiopian crisis and restrained for months to comment on the issue at all. The silence in Moscow was due to the complicated diplomatic conditions that prevailed in late 1934 and during 1935. Soviet foreign policy's main priority was to safeguard its rapprochement with France and Italy in its attempt to contain Nazi German expansionism. Mussolini's Ethiopian ambitions therefore posed an acute dilemma for the Soviet Government: how to block Italian aggression and at the same time safeguard the Soviet European security system? Neither was it in the interest of Soviet foreign policy to support the British standpoint of putting the Ethiopian issue on the agenda of the Council of the League of Nations. Least of all, the Kremlin and the Soviet Foreign Ministry was interested in a high-profile Ethiopian campaign orchestrated by the Comintern.⁸⁷

The Comintern publicly commented upon the Ethiopian crisis as late as September 1935. On the other hand, the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) discussed the crisis already in February 1935. At this point, the ECCI's main interest was to connect the Ethiopian crisis with Japanese imperialism, as it was believed that Japan was trying to establish close military, economic and political relationships with the Ethiopian Emperor.⁸⁸ The first guidelines for political agitation outlined a popular campaign that was to highlight the defence of the national integrity of Ethiopia though not to support the Ethiopian Emperor's regime. The campaign in mind was never projected as a defence of the political independence of bourgeois and imperialist Empire of Abyssinia as such. While the various Communist Parties and trade unions were to be mobilized in the campaign against Italian aggression under the slogan "Hands Off Abyssinia", its leitmotiv was the old unified anti-imperialist struggle of the Black and White workers.⁸⁹ A few days later, telegrams were sent to the

86 See further Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*, Chapter 9.

87 See further Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933–39* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), pp. 60–63, and J. Calvitt Clarke III, *Alliance of the Colored Peoples: Ethiopia & Japan Before World War II* (Oxford: James Currey, 2011).

88 Die japanischen Imperialisten in Abessinien, no author, report dated "25" 01987/10/ku 22.2.[19]35, RGASPI 495/4/459, 1–4. It seems as if the last page(s) of the report are missing in the file. The report had been either commissioned or written by Bela Kun.

89 See Leitsätze für den Kampf gegen den Krieg in Abessinien, no author, memorandum dated "25"/2194/10 27.II.[19]35, RGASPI 495/11/2, 4–9. The last page(s) of the memorandum are missing.

Communist Parties. The British Party, for example, was instructed to strengthen its effort to mobilise against the danger of an imperialist war and to expose British imperialism as furthering the Italian aggression. The Party was ordered to characterise the Italian aggression as a “colonial predatory war”. The Ethiopian side was to be presented as fighting a “war of national independence” in spite of the (alleged) connections between Ethiopia and Japan as well as the fact that the country was ruled by “Monarchist feudalist group”. Also, the Party was sanctioned to expose the shipment of war armament through the Suez Canal as a rupture of British neutrality and to popularise the anti-war struggle and Hands off Abyssinia campaigns.⁹⁰ The League Against Imperialism, whose headquarters had been relocated from Berlin via Paris to London in 1933, had been among the first to react on the Italian aggression in December 1934,⁹¹ and received instructions to get in touch with the World Committee Against War and Fascism in Paris, i.e., the Amsterdam-Pleyel movement,⁹² in order to form a delegation for Ethiopia.⁹³

One month later, in March 1935, the analysis and guidelines were updated by the ECCI and contained a lengthy discussion on the history of Italian aggression in the Horn of Africa.⁹⁴ A new circular letter to the British, French, Swiss, Spanish and US American Communist Parties was sent in April although it merely repeated the March theses on the Ethiopian crisis, including the urge to launch anti-war campaigns.⁹⁵

Although Moscow launched one investigation after the other, neither the ECCI nor the Kremlin had made any official statements or had made official proclamations to the Communist Parties how to proceed on the Ethiopian crisis. Moscow’s official silence provoked criticism – not only from the non-communist camp but also from within.⁹⁶ On the other hand, “independent”

90 (Intercepted) Telegram Nos. 116–118 from P.C. to C.C., 3 March 1935, published in Nigel West, *MASK: MI5’s Penetration of the Communist Party of Great Britain* (London and New York: Routledge 2005), p. 147.

91 (Reginald Bridgeman,) LAI Report 1934, RGASPI 542/1/61, 15.

92 On the Amsterdam-Pleyel movement, see further David James Fisher, *Romain Rolland and the Politics of Intellectual Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 166–170.

93 (Intercepted) Telegram No. 115 to Anti-Imperialist League, 3 March 1935, published in West, *MASK*, p. 147.

94 Ferdi, Ethiopie, sous la menace d’invasion imperialiste. Le fascisme italien se lance à une guerre de rapide en Afrique Orientale, 20.3.1935, RGASPI 495/11/2, 10–27.

95 Peter [Kerrigan] to Harry Pollitt, [Moscow] no date, handwritten add: 3/VI/35, RGASPI 495/20/44, 46. Similar circular letter in German in RGASPI 495/20/609, 10–12.

96 Extract from Harry Pollitt’s letter to Peter Kerrigan, 21.9.1935, RGASPI 495/20/44, 72.

organizations, such as the League Against Imperialism and the World Committee Against War and Fascism, could certainly launch a campaign against the Italian aggression as long as it was clear that they did speak in the name of the Comintern or the Soviet Union.⁹⁷

The ITUCNW and the Hands off Abyssinia Campaign, 1934–1935

The only communist organisation that reacted on the Italian aggression already in late 1934 was the ITUCNW. Otto Huiswoud had issued shortly after the Walwal incident a warning of Italian imperialist aggression in *The Negro Worker*.⁹⁸ His interpretation of the Ethiopian crisis was a clear and realistic: the only way to counter the Italian aggression was to call for a global campaign. When the Italians started to build up their military strength in Eritrea and Somaliland during spring 1935, he quickly responded and *The Negro Worker* carried monthly articles and proclamations condemning the Italian aggression.⁹⁹

Huiswoud's initial plan was to initiate a global campaign against the Italian aggression. Calls for a united front of Black and White workers against the "fascist aggression" were published in the name of the ITUCNW and already in December 1934 he issued his first appeal for an active campaign of protest and action. The appeal was reprinted in the press of the Gold Coast, South Africa, and British Guyana. At least the British Guiana Labour Union raised the call for Ethiopia at its May Day demonstration. A second appeal was issued in June 1935 calling for the establishment of Hands Off Abyssinia Committees. According to Huiswoud, this call received even wider press publicity than the first one and the first response was a "big 'Hands Off Abyssinia' demonstration" in Johannesburg on July 17 and a few weeks later a "united front meeting" adopted protest resolutions and created a Hands Off Abyssinia Committee in South Africa. Elsewhere in the African Atlantic protest movements and relief committees were formed:

97 Fisher, *Romain Rolland*, 192.

98 "Italian Imperialism Attacks Abyssinia", *The Negro Worker*, IV:8 (December 1934); "Italian Imperialists Grab at Abyssinia", *The Negro Worker*, V:1 (January 1935).

99 Charles Woodson [aka Otto Huiswoud], "Italy's Grab for Africa", *The Negro Worker*, V:2–3 (February–March 1935); Central Committee of the Italian Communist Party and Young Communist League, "Hands Off Abyssinia", *The Negro Worker*, V:2–3 (February–March 1935); Charles Woodson, "Italian Troops Pour into Africa", *The Negro Worker*, V:4 (April 1935); J.W. Ford, "For Defence of Ethiopia", *The Negro Worker*, V:5 (May 1935); W.L. Patterson, "The Abyssinian Situation and the Negro World", *The Negro Worker*, V:6 (June 1935); ITUCNW, "Hands Off Abyssinia", *The Negro Worker*, V:7–8 (July–August 1935).

In Jamaica, Trinidad and British Guiana protest meetings and demonstrations have been held and relief committees to aid Abyssinia have been established. In the Gold Coast the Youth League adopted protest resolutions and organised a relief committee. The Liberian toilers have organised a committee of action in defence of Abyssinia. The Negro workers in London, Cardiff, North Shields, etc. have held a series of protest meetings while Negro seamen aboard British vessels resolved to pledge their support to the Abyssinian people.¹⁰⁰

A third appeal was published by the ITUCNW in September 1935 calling for the intensification of activities.¹⁰¹

But did the ITUCNW orchestrate the Abyssinian campaigns in 1935 at all as Huiswoud's report seems to claim? His or the ITUCNW's name is never mentioned in the accounts of the various activities.¹⁰² Instead, local agencies in Africa, the Caribbean or the United States are recalled. In the British Caribbean Colonies, the leading force claimed to be the Garvey Movement, the local labour unions and parties and independent organizations such as the International Friends of Ethiopia.¹⁰³ Neither was there any reference made to the ITUCNW appeals in Nigeria or on the Gold Coast when local Hands Off Abyssinia Committees were formed. In the United States, the Ethiopia Research Council had already been established in December 1934, followed by the Provisional Committee for the Defense of Ethiopia in February 1935, and in July 1935 the Friends of Ethiopia was inaugurated. None of these organizations had any ties to the communists.¹⁰⁴ In France, the French Communist Party remained silent; instead, a variety of groups ranging from the radical to the moderate

100 (Huiswoud,) ITUCNW Report 1934–1935, RGASPI 534/3/1055, 13.

101 (Huiswoud,) ITUCNW Report 1934–1935, RGASPI 534/3/1055, 14.

102 Neither in Robert G. Weisbord's account on the various campaigns in support of Abyssinia/Ethiopia in the USA or the Caribbean or in S.K.B. Asante's on the protest movements in West Africa, see Robert G. Weisbord, *Ebony Kinship. Africa, Africans, and the Afro-American* (Westport, CT & London: Greenwood Press, 1973), and S.K.B. Asante, *Pan-African Protest: West Africa and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1934–1941* (London: Longman, 1977).

103 Robert G. Weisbord, "British West Indian Reaction to the Italian-Ethiopian War: An Episode in Pan-Africanism", *Caribbean Studies* 10:1 (1970), pp. 35–38.

104 Cedric J. Robinson, "The African Diaspora and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis", *Race and Class* 27:2 (1985), pp. 61–62. Officially, the USA took a policy of non-interference in the crisis and as a result, the Abyssinian campaign remained to a large extent an African American issue (Sharon Gramby-Sobukwe, "Africa and US. Foreign Policy: Contributions of the Diaspora to Democratic African Leadership", *Journal of Black Studies* 35:6 [2005], p. 787).

spectrum joined hands in the support of Ethiopia,¹⁰⁵ while the International African Friends of Abyssinia and Pan-African Brotherhood became the spearheads of the campaign in support of Ethiopia in the United Kingdom.¹⁰⁶ On 22 August 1935, an international conference to coordinate the Ethiopian campaign took place in Paris, sponsored by Etoile Nord-Africaine and the Ligue de la Défense de la Race Nègre.¹⁰⁷

By summer 1935 it was evident that neither Communist parties nor organisations and trade unions were taking the lead in organising a global campaign against the Italian aggression. African American activists and organisations like the NAACP started in public to question the silence in Moscow.¹⁰⁸ However, the biggest blow for Huiswoud and his campaign was George Padmore's article in *The Crisis* about the betrayal of the anti-imperialist cause by the Soviet Union and its failure to condemn the Italian aggression in the League of Nations.¹⁰⁹ Arnold Ward anxiously reported to Huiswoud that "G.P.'s article on Abyssinia in the Crisis is well read among Negroes [in the UK] and you can well judge for yourself it has done us a lot of harm", and criticised the CPGB, the LAI and the World Movement Against War and Fascism for their inactivity and bitterly remarked that as a consequence Padmore and Garvey were in the forefront of the campaign.¹¹⁰

The Seventh Comintern Congress, the Popular Front Tactic and Ethiopia

The Comintern's first official comments on the Ethiopian crisis came at the time of the international conference on Ethiopia in Paris. The first response was a vague and half-hearted one by Palmiro Togliatti, who presented a report on "the preparation of a new world war by the imperialists and the tasks of the Communist International" at the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern on 10–11 August 1935. According to him, Japanese imperialism and German fascism were the main advocates of war. Great Britain was denounced not only as the "champion of colonial oppression" but also for encouraging Nazism and seeking to channel Japanese and German aggression into an anti-Soviet front.

105 James E. Genova, "The Empire Within: The Colonial Popular Front in France, 1934–1938", *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 26:2 (2001), pp. 175–209.

106 Derrick, *Africa's 'Agitators'*, pp. 333–337; Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*, pp. 199–212.

107 Genova, "The Empire Within", p. 187.

108 See further J. Calvitt Clarke III, Italy, Russia, Japan, Ethiopia, and the War of 1935–6, paper presented to the Third Pan-European International Relations Conference and Joint Meeting with The International Studies Association, Vienna, Austria, September 16–19, 1998.

109 George Padmore, "Ethiopia and World Politics", *The Crisis* 42 (May 5, 1935), pp. 138–139.

110 Letter from W[ard] to [Otto Huiswoud], 26.6.1935, RGASPI 495/155/102, 15.

Togliatti also attacked Italian imperialism, shortly touched upon the threat of an Italian invasion of Ethiopia and made a passionate declaration of solidarity with the Ethiopian people.¹¹¹

In the discussions on Togliatti's report, André Marty defended the Franco-Soviet pact though criticized the French government for its agreement with Mussolini on Ethiopia. Finally, the resolution on the report concluded that Mussolini's impending invasion of Ethiopia was creating a new tension in relations between the Imperialist Powers – echoing the position of Soviet foreign policy rather than articulating a clear-cut condemnation of Italy and a call to rally behind the cause of Ethiopia.¹¹² In late August, the Comintern issued the "Declaration of Support for Abyssinia" and sent it to the Communist Parties of Italy, France, Great Britain, USA, South Africa, Cuba, Brazil, Panama and Portugal.¹¹³ These were the first official instructions sent by Moscow, opening the way for the application of a "united front" policy in the Ethiopian campaign. Still, no official statement had been forthcoming and a representative of the British Party inquired whether the ECCI is going to make it or if the European parties are supposed to issue a joint one?¹¹⁴ Following Jonathan Haslam, at this point – if not earlier – a kind of tactical division of labour in the engagement of the Comintern and the Communist Parties had been outlined. While the Italian Communist Party, which had protested against Fascist aggression under the banner of the Hands Off Abyssinia campaign already in February 1935, was to agitate on Abyssinia, the French Party was to mobilise the leading European Socialist Parties into a unified solidarity platform. The Comintern, however, would not be officially engaged. A conference was to be organized in Paris in early September, a resolution was passed calling on the League of Nations to take energetic measures in defence of Ethiopian independence.¹¹⁵

The Paris Conference in September 1935 was mainly a gathering of representatives of the Communist Parties and organizations. While the *Pravda* hailed

111 Aldo Agosti, *Palmiro Togliatti. A Biography* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008), pp. 100–102.

112 E.H. Carr, *Twilight of the Comintern* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1982), pp. 413–416; Clarke, "Italy, Russia, Japan, Ethiopia, and the War of 1935–6."

113 Handwritten add: "Declaration of Support for Abyssinia", marked "7", dated 28.8.1935, RGASPI 495/14/60, fo. 22–25. The mark "7" stands for author/sender = Eastern Secretariat. The handwritten adds and corrections to the text are similar to William L. Patterson's writing.

114 (Intercepted) Telegram No. 97 from West to Secretariat, 11 September 1935, published in West, *MASK*, p. 80.

115 Haslam, *The Soviet Union*, pp. 64–65.

the conference as an important opening – someone from the British Labour Party attended the conference – it was an overstatement: the Second International turned its back to the call and was not interested in unified activities.¹¹⁶ Still, by September 1935 it was evident that Paris had emerged as the key centre for the pro-Ethiopian movement in Europe.

However, behind the curtains, the Comintern headquarters had started to work on the Ethiopian crisis. Palmiro Togliatti's Secretariat was ordered to prepare a report on the issue after the Seventh Congress. The ECCI Presidium discussed Togliatti's report on 26 September 1935.¹¹⁷ A few days earlier, the ECCI Secretariat had published a call of Dimitrov to form a united front with the Second International to prevent the escalation of the conflict into a new world war.¹¹⁸ Also, instructions were sent to the British Party ordering them to establish contacts with the French Party in order to launch a broad public campaign along the popular front-doctrine, i.e., aiming to include the British Labour Party, the Socialist League and the Independent Labour Party.¹¹⁹

The Comintern's move was a direct consequence of the change in the Soviet position in the Ethiopian crisis. Up to mid-September, the grand strategy was based on getting France and Britain behind a combined action that was both directed against the Italian aggression and the containment of Germany. The crux of the matter was still that while the first strategy included the threat of economic sanctions against Italy, the second was based on Italian participation. When the Soviet Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov heard of secret Anglo-French negotiations aimed at appeasing Italy, the tactics had to be changed and the Soviet Union had to take a more forthright position in the Ethiopian crisis.¹²⁰ But the leaders of the Second International did not respond to Dimitrov's invitation. A second call was sent to London a few days after the Italian attack on Ethiopia in early October.¹²¹ The League Against Imperialism and World Committee Against War and Fascism, too, immediately protested

¹¹⁶ Haslam, *The Soviet Union*, p. 65.

¹¹⁷ Agosti, *Palmiro Togliatti*, p. 104.

¹¹⁸ Telegram from the ECCI Secretariat to the LSI Secretariat on the Danger of War in Abyssinia, 23.9.1935, in Jane Degras (ed.), *The Communist International 1919–1943. Documents Vol. III, 1919–1943* (London: Frank Cass, 1971), p. 378.

¹¹⁹ (Intercepted) Telegram Nos. 380–383 from Peter and Ercoli [Togliatti], 22 September 1935, published in West, *MASK*, p. 165.

¹²⁰ Haslam, *The Soviet Union*, p. 68.

¹²¹ Telegram from the ECCI Secretariat to the LSI Secretariat 7.10.1935, in Degras, *Document Vol. III*, p. 378.

against the Italian attack and called for the formation of a unified front against Italian imperialism.¹²²

Unfortunately, the Second International was not interested in a unified campaign instigated by the Communists. Throughout the world, the communists received similar negative answers to their calls for unified Hands Off Abyssinia campaigns. In Australia, for example, the Communist Party had invited various political parties, the Churches, and other organisations for joint mass demonstrations but at least the official reaction from the Churches was a negative one.¹²³ In South Africa, too, most of the Churches rejected the invitation to join the Hands Off Abyssinia Committee, an initiative that was criticised by the local Trotskists for being a platform applying the “usual principles of broad People’s Front, that is to say, without principles”.¹²⁴

The Collapse of the ITUCNW, 1935–1938

In autumn 1935, Huiswoud must have felt that the ITUCNW was losing its momentum and had to admit that its Ethiopian campaign had failed.¹²⁵ The deathblow of his campaign came when *The Crisis* in an editorial in October 1935 denounced Soviet hypocrisy and charged the Soviet Union for selling wheat and coal to Italy for use in the war in Ethiopia.¹²⁶ The news travelled all around the African Atlantic with the result that many Black activists broke with the Communist Party and communist organisations.¹²⁷ On top of all, Huiswoud felt isolated in Amsterdam and the illegal status of the organization had effectively blocked any cooperation with the Comintern’s various organs.

122 R. Bridgeman, Statement by the League Against Imperialism and for National Independence for the Defence of the Independence and Territorial Integrity of Ethiopia, 8.10.1935, RGASPI 542/1/62, 62–63; Fisher, *Romain Rolland*, p. 204.

123 “‘Hands Off’ Churches reply to Communist Invitation”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Friday 27 September 1935, page 11.

124 “People’s Front and the Cry for Unity in South Africa,” *The Spark* 2, 4 April 1936, in: Document 89, Allison Drew (ed.), *South Africa’s Radical Tradition. A documentary history, Volume 1, 1907 – 1950* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1996), available at: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/south-africas-radical-tradition-documentary-history-volume-one-1907-1950-allison-drew> (checked 9.5.2016).

125 (Huiswoud,) ITUCNW Report 1934–1935, RGASPI 534/3/1055, 14.

126 “Soviet Russia Aids Italy”, *The Crisis* 42:10 (October 1935).

127 Clarke, “Italy, Russia, Japan, Ethiopia, and the War of 1935–6”, Christian Høgsbjerg, *Mariner, Renegade & Castaway: Chris Braithwaite: Seamen’s Organiser, Socialist and Militant Pan-Africanist* (London: Socialist History Society & Redwoods, 2014), pp. 101–102.

What was needed was a thorough revision of the strategies and objectives of his work.

Huiswoud's grand plan was the reorganization of the ITUCNW. In October 1935, he proposed the transformation of the ITUCNW into an umbrella organization for all Black worker organizations, trade unions and individuals in the colonies and the metropolitan countries that were sympathetic to its programme.¹²⁸ The reorganization was to be symbolised by a new logo that included all parts of the radical African Atlantic. In effect, Huiswoud's envisioned the transformation of the ITUCNW into a Black International. Such a vision had been blocked by the ECCI in 1931. However, with the Comintern's transition to the Popular Front policy in 1934/1935, a totally new situation gradually emerged. The "class against class" strategy was revised at the Comintern's Seventh World Congress, held in Moscow in July-August 1935. Cooperation with, and not anymore opposition to, socialist and radical bourgeois parties was to become the baseline of communist agenda. This was an agenda that projected the formation of united fronts against fascism. Huiswoud and the ITUCNW were caught in the maelstrom of ever changing propositions and guidelines, which were created in Moscow over the next two years. Nevertheless, the main challenge in Moscow was how the Popular Front tactics were to be applied to work in Africa and in the Caribbean. What was the future role of the ITUCNW?

The first plan for the future of the ITUCNW called for its liquidation. At the Seventh World Congress, African and African American delegates had proposed the formation of a new anti-imperialist platform, termed the International Negro Liberation Committee.¹²⁹ The idea was to establish a new forum based on the Popular Front principle, its objective was to include all organizations active in the campaign against the Italian aggression against Ethiopia.¹³⁰ In their mind, the ITUCNW was inadequate for this purpose and could hardly be expected to develop into a global force.¹³¹

The declaration of the Negro delegates resulted in an investigation by Comintern Secretary André Marty on the current status of work in the African Atlantic in October 1935. He asked Zusmanovich to prepare an overview of the

128 (Huiswoud,) ITUCNW Report 1934-1935, RGASPI 534/3/1055, 16.

129 Confidential memorandum (in French), no author, dated 8.10.1935, RGASPI 495/155/102, 77. A critical analysis of the memorandum reveals that it was most likely written by Zusmanovich. A reference to his report is made in André Marty's letter to the ECCI Secretariat, dated 17.10.1935, RGASPI 495/155/102, 51.

130 Confidential (declaration), The International Negro Liberation Committee, no date, no author, RGASPI 495/155/102, 25.

131 The International Negro Liberation Committee, no date, no author, RGASPI 495/155/102, 26.

work and connections of the ECCI Negro Bureau. Zusmanovich's report made a positive account of the Negro Bureau and ITUCNW. The ITUCNW, he concluded, was to be given the leading role in both establishing trade unions in the African colonies and to serve as their umbrella organisation.¹³² André Marty did not agree with Zusmanovich's conclusions. Instead, he considered a total reconfiguration of the Negro work to be the only effective solution. Contrary to Zusmanovich's proposal, Marty was in favour of the International Negro Liberation Committee and charged the ECCI Propaganda Committee to direct its anti-imperialist campaigns.¹³³

Nevertheless, a few weeks later the situation changed again when Huiswoud arrived in Moscow and delivered his annual report on the activities of the ITUCNW. Whether or not he knew about Marty's plan and Zusmanovich's proposal is unclear but his report forcefully propagated the ITUCNW as the propaganda platform or "Popular front" for the African Atlantic. His plan was simple but visionary: the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers was to be transformed into a platform for African and Caribbean labour unions – a Black International. All radical anti-colonial unions, groups and individuals in the African Atlantic were to be invited to join the platform. The only conditions for affiliation were "that they accept the program of the Committee to struggle for full economic equality, for Negro rights and against imperialist oppression". Most importantly was the need to summon a new World Conference of Negro Workers.¹³⁴

Huiswoud's report on the ITUCNW's activities was discussed at a meeting of the RILU Secretariat in early November.¹³⁵ Much to the relief of Huiswoud and Zusmanovich, the meeting backed the proposal to develop the organization into a Black International and underlined the need to organize a General Conference of Negro Workers in Paris. Its main task was the reorganization of the ITUCNW.¹³⁶

The planned Second World Negro Conference never materialized. Parallel to Huiswoud's attempt to revitalize the ITUCNW, the dismantlement of the RILU apparatus continued in Moscow. In April 1936, the Executive Committee

132 Confidential memorandum (in French), 8.10.1935, RGASPI 495/155/102, 77.

133 Memorandum by André Marty addressed to the Comintern Secretariat, 17.10.1935, RGASPI 495/155/102, 51.

134 (Huiswoud,) ITUCNW Report 1934–1935, RGASPI 534/3/1055, 16–17.

135 Material zur Sitzung des Sekretariats am 4.11.1935, RGASPI 534/3/1055, 25–32.

136 Proposal (handwritten add: Decision of the Sec of the R.I.L.U. re the future work of the N.C.), dated 10.11.1935, RGASPI 495/155/101, 38–39.

of the RILU held its last meeting while the RILU Secretariat operated until May 1936 and thereafter only on an ad hoc and limited basis. The RILU apparatus in Moscow was reduced from about 155 members in late 1935 to about 50 half a year later.¹³⁷ In early June, a sub-committee started to investigate the Negro work of the RILU and the future of the ITUCNW.¹³⁸

The internal investigation resulted into lengthy report, the *Special Discussion Material on the Negro Question*. Its most important section was a critical assessment on the ITUCNW written by William L. Patterson. It depicted the ITUCNW as a total failure both in the United States and in the African Atlantic. His conclusion was a bitter one:

The five years of the existence of the ITUCNW has not tended to broaden its extremely sectarian and narrow base. During this period it has virtually led an illegal existence. It has no individual membership and no mass organisation are affiliated to it. It consists of a few names, only one or two widely known, and these as Communists. It is allegedly a Communist trade union organisation. It is in fact no organisation. Who and what is the ITUCNW remains for the Black colonies as much as a mystery ever. It should be allowed to die a natural death. There should be no official liquidation and no noises made about it.¹³⁹

As a result, he declared, renegades, such as Padmore, and Negro bourgeois nationalist-reformist, such as Garvey and Du Bois, were gaining momentum with their Pan-African movements.¹⁴⁰

By mid-1937, both Huiswoud and the comrades in Moscow knew that the ITUCNW was a lost cause. On the 27th of July 1937, the ECCI Secretariat decided to liquidate the ITUCNW and to convert it into a "committee to assist the cultural development of the Negroes in Africa".¹⁴¹ A new committee, titled "Paris Committee in Defence of African Negroes" was to replace the ITUCNW as the vehicle for organizing and drawing the African toilers "into the struggle

137 Tosstorff, *Profintern*, pp. 701–703.

138 Minutes of the Sub-committee Meeting on International Negro Work, no date, RGASPI 534/3/1103, 55.

139 (Patterson), The International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, 4.7.1936, RGASPI 534/3/1103, 31.

140 (Patterson), The International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, 4.7.1936, RGASPI 534/3/1103, 32–38.

141 EKKI Sekretariat, Protokoll (A) Nr. 155, 27.6.1937, RGASPI 495/18/1206, 1.

for their economic demands and political rights".¹⁴² The new Committee was never materialized.

By Conclusion: The ITUCNW between Moscow and the African Atlantic

If the ITUCNW was only a minor – and at no time an important – brick in the circuits of the Comintern, Hamburg emerged as the focal point of the radical African Atlantic during Padmore's era as secretary of the ITUCNW. In the long run, such a situation inevitably was to lead to a clash between Padmore's ambitions to create a Black trans-Atlantic network with himself and the ITUCNW in the centre and the objectives set up in Moscow. Perhaps Padmore even believed that the anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist cause was superior to the fourth pillar of the grand objectives of the Comintern, namely to safeguard the existence of the Bolshevik revolution and to defend the Soviet Union. Before 1933 he seems to have downplayed the Stalinization of the Comintern and had little understanding of the Soviet-French rapprochement in 1934. Padmore's fate in 1933 was that he chose to distance himself from Moscow. For him, the consequence was a "positive marginalization": he was free to develop his idea of a radical African Atlantic, a political space outside the control of the Comintern. Moscow's strategy was the "negative marginalization" of Padmore, i.e., to block his political space and to control his radical Pan-Africanist ambitions. Instead of two circuits, Huiswoud's order in 1934 was to bring the radical African Atlantic into total control of the Comintern.

However, in retrospect, the volte-face of Comintern policy in 1934–1935 and the (re-)introduction of the "Popular front" doctrine marked the end of active Communist anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism. The collapse of the Comintern's anti-imperialist policy in the African Atlantic became evident in 1935–36 with its incapability to take a leading role in the Ethiopian campaign. The ITUCNW, once established as an "opposition" platform, had no place in the new set-up of merged Communist, Socialist and/or Social Democratic organizations. Neither had it any impact or position in the African Atlantic. In fact, by 1936 it hardly existed apart from Otto Huiswoud's office in Amsterdam and later in Paris.

Last, but not least, did the Black Comrades make any impact at all in the African Atlantic? In West Africa, towards Ford, Padmore and Huiswoud had

¹⁴² (No author,) On work among Negroes, confidential report translated from Russian, 3.7.1937, appendix to ECCI Protocol Nr. 155, RGASPI 495/18/1206, 37–39.

invested much time and effort, the Comintern engagement with local radicals and activists was a dead end. No political movement, association or party was ever high jacked or established by Moscow-trained “fellow travellers”. The syndicalist activities of the RILU, especially its Negro Section or the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, was for a short period more successful. In about 1930, it seemed as if radical trade or labour unions would mushroom in all British West African colonies. However, a few years later nothing was left of this approach either and by 1935, direct links between the ITUCNW and British West Africa had been cut.

Much of Moscow’s “failure” to establish any lasting contacts with the Anglophone West African radicals were due to miscalculations of the Communists themselves. However, the final analysis has to be broadened and the West African perspective has to be integrated as well. Apart from the aspirations and plans of the Bolsheviks and the Comintern/RILU apparatchniks, the West African intellectuals, with whom the Comintern was either able to establish contacts or aspired to do so, had other preferences and plans. For most of them, Moscow or other communist/radical front organizations were but one of many options in their endless attempts to enlist support for their various causes. Only a tiny minority of the West African intellectuals can be labelled as Communists or for having been “fellow travellers”. Most of the intellectuals who at one point or another were connected with the Comintern and its network had never the slightest intention of fully engaging themselves with the Communist/Bolshevik cause. None of them ever articulated the need for a radical, violent rupture. Political, economic and social change, according to the West African intellectuals, was to come through protest and lobbying, agitation and demonstration, but never through a mass uprising against the colonial state.

Eventually, there was one positive effect of the ITUCNW in the African Atlantic. The turning-point of political Pan-Africanism was the Fifth Pan-African Congress that convened in Manchester, UK, in September 1945. In contrast to the earlier congresses, the meeting in Manchester was attended by a large number of African activists. Most of the elder generation that gathered in Manchester in October 1945, such as Padmore, Wallace-Jonson and Kenyatta, had come into contact with each other through their engagement with the Hamburg Committee. In this work they gathered practical experience of anti-colonial work, establishing networks and organizations, preparing conferences and drafting political statements. Some of them had also received some training in Moscow. These insights and skills were later used by all of them when they established their new platforms and embarked on challenging the colonial state in Africa. In this sense, the 1930 July Hamburg Conference that led to the establishment of the International Trade Union of Negro Worker was one of the wet-nurses of modern Africa.

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